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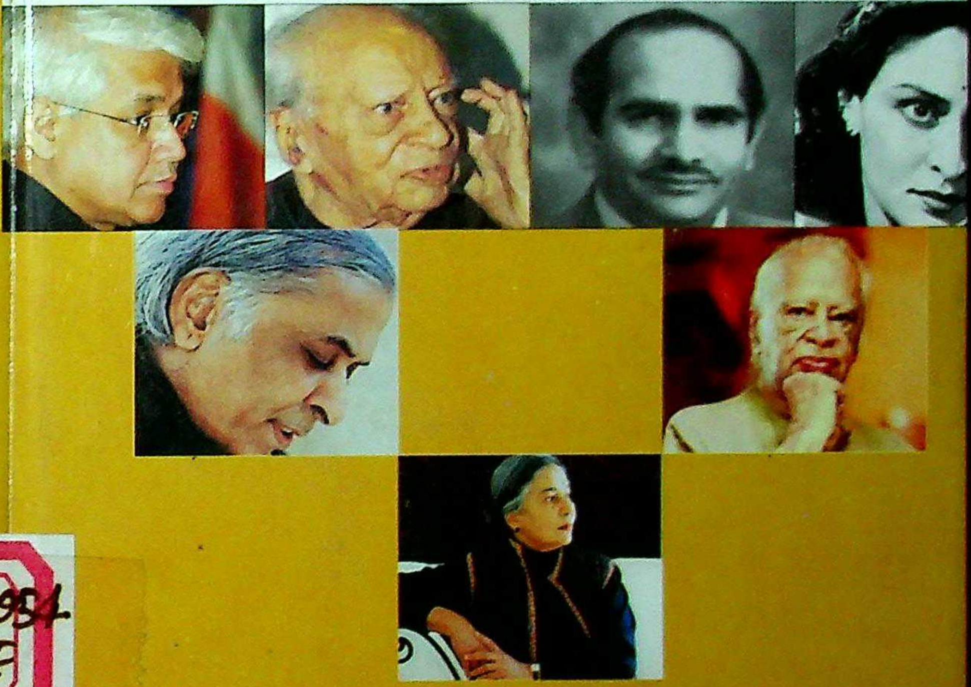

Dr. S. K. Mittal
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ENCYCLOPAEDIA
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(R. K. NARAYAN: A CRITICAL STUDY)

Vol. 2

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PREFACE

Indian English literature is an endeavour of showcasing the rare gems of Indian writing in English. From being a curious native explosion, Indian English has become a new form of Indian culture and voice in which India speaks. While Indian authors, poets, novelists, essayists, dramatists have been making significant contributions to world literature since the pre-Independence era, the past few years have seen a massive flourishing of Indian English writing in the international market. Not only are the works of Indian authors writing in English soaring on the best-seller list, they are also receiving a great deal of critical acclaim. Starting from Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan, Anita Desai, Toru Dutt to Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, Allan Sealy, Amitav Ghosh, Jhumpa Lahiri, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Arundhati Roy, Vikram Chandra … the parade of fine Indian writers is long and lengthening.

Present-day India boasts an English-language literature of energy and diversity and has spawned a striking literary diaspora. Some writers of Indian descent (V. S. Naipaul , Bharati Mukherjee) now reject the ethnic label of 'Indian writers'. Mukherjee sees herself as American, while Naipaul would perhaps prefer to be read as an artist from nowhere and everywhere. For some Indian critics, English-language Indian writing is a post-colonial anomaly; its continuing use of the old colonial tongue is seen as a fatal flaw and renders it inauthentic. However, others have argued that English became a naturalized subcontinental language long ago. And it is part of the achievement of English-language Indian writers to have found literary voices as distinctively Indian, but also suitable for all purposes of art, as those other languages forged in Ireland, Africa, the West Indies, and the United States.

Encyclopaedia of Indian English Criticism is prepared keeping in view of the Indian students undergoing P.G. and U.G. in different Indian Universities. All authors and their works are selected strictly following the latest syllabus. Critical discussions are examination oriented. This encyclopaedia is a huge source of reference for scholars and teachers. The major works of selected authors are critically analysed taking help of different expert critics and research scholars working on those particular authors.

Editors

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Introduction

R. K. Narayan's novels are like a box of Indian sweets: a highly coloured container conceals a range of delectable treats, all different in a subtle way, but each one clearly from the same place. There are fourteen novels in the oeuvre, enough to create a world. Enthusiasts of his work will read them all and return to them time and again. The busy, or the less committed, may open the box and take out one at random, it does not really matter which order one reads them in. But be warned: the consumption of one leads to a strong craving for more.

Narayan's life spanned the twentieth century, which meant that he belonged both to an old world and a new. At the time of his birth in 1906, the British Raj, that astonishing imperial conceit, was firmly in place, as were those ironclad notions of caste that were to prove so difficult to shrug off. The British presence in India had brought with it a large civil service, an educational system, and railways, to all of which institutions the people of the incontinent took with enthusiasm. But it had also brought with it a language, and the literature which that language created, and it is this which proved a most productive legacy. The British took English to India and the Indians gave back a literary tradition which continues to delight and enrich us to this day. Contemporary writers such as Vikram Seth, Rohinton Mistry, or Anita Desai, whose novels have given such pleasure to readers in Europe and North America, stand rooted in a tradition which R. K. Narayan, as one of the earlier Indian novelists to write in English, did a great deal to establish. Although Narayan did not draw attention to his personal life, he did write a memoir, *My Days*, which tells us a great deal about his boyhood years and the inception and development of his literary career. His childhood was fairly typical of that of a middle-class boy of the time. His father was the headmaster of a school, a somewhat stern figure in his professional life, and this connection with the world of education is very much apparent in the earlier novels, where schools, colleges, and the whole business of becoming educated play a major role. His father's job required mobility and Narayan spent a number of childhood years living with his grandmother in Madras.

Eventually, though, he joined his parents in Mysore, where he attended the school presided over by his father. He became a voracious reader, wading through the books and magazines which arrived on his father's desk for the school library. As he wrote in *My Days*: My father did not mind our taking away whatever we wanted to read provided we put them back on his desk without spoiling them, as they had to be placed on the school's reading-room table on Monday morning. So our week-end reading was full and varied. We could dream over the advertisement pages in the *Boys' Own Paper* or the *Strand Magazine*. Through the *Strand* we made the acquaintance of all English writers: Conan Doyle, Wodehouse, W.W. Jacobs, Arnold Bennett, and every English fiction writer worth the name . . . Through *Harper's* and the *Atlantic*, and *American Mercury* we attained glimpses of the New World and its writers.

This sense of distance, of being a participant in a culture and yet not being of it, is a familiar feature of the literature of what is now the British Commonwealth and it is vividly portrayed in Narayan's novels. Colonialism hurt and damaged those subjected to it, but it would be inaccurate to portray the process as being a simple matter of subjugation and humiliation; it was far more complex than that. The writer in the colonised country tended to soak up the culture of the colonial power and feel a familiarity and some affection for it, even though the experience of colonialism may have demoralised and destabilised his own colonised culture. This damage, although it may later be seen for what it is, is passed over: in his mind he is a member-in-waiting of a broader community of letters.

His aspirations, though, are likely to be dashed; his yearning unfulfilled. Although he may not realise it, the metropolitan culture is largely indifferent to him and his world: the literary circles after which he yearns are distant, impossibly out of reach. Of course, the conquest is feasible, and literary doors may open. Narayan himself made it, as did others, although some did so by leaving the culture in which they had been brought up. Narayan remained in India – an Indian writer who was happy to be read by those outside India but who remained firmly within the world into which he had been born.

The young Narayan was not a great scholar. Having failed his university entrance examinations, he spent a year reading and writing before he eventually succeeded in being admitted to the B.A. course at Maharaja's College. During this year he acquired a copy of a book called *How to Sell your Manuscripts* and started to send his literary efforts off to magazines in London. He met with no success, encountering for the first time those pieces of paper so familiar, and yet so devastating, to the aspiring writer – the printed rejection slip. In due course he completed his studies and graduated as a Bachelor of Arts.

There then followed various attempts by his father and others to secure him a position. These were mostly unsuccessful, although they eventually bore fruit in the shape of a teaching post where he was immediately required to teach Tennyson's *Morte d'Arthur* to a class of burly and uncooperative boys who had no interest in poetry. His teaching career was a dismal failure and shortly afterwards he walked out of the school and returned home. That was that: he would become a writer.

How many have made that decision, and how many have failed. And how many aspiring writers have written their first novel in the belief that it is fiction, only to discover that it is really about them, and, quite commonly, about their childhood.

Swami and Friends, Narayan's first novel, is a novel of boyhood which draws heavily on his own experiences. Narayan sent the typescript to a series of publishers in London and became accustomed to having it returned at regular intervals.

He experienced similar rejection with the short stories which he was now writing, although he eventually succeeded in his ambition to get into print abroad when a piece he wrote for *Punch* magazine in London was accepted and produced a handsome fee of six guineas.

Narayan was to use this small measure of success to persuade his future father-in-law that the financial prospects of a writer were not entirely gloomy. But he needed more than this: the unsuitability of his horoscope was seen by his intended bride's family as being a major drawback to a possible match, and it was only after lengthy discussions that the marriage was able to go ahead. Narayan's personal experience of the vagaries of matrimonial astrology was later reflected in the highly amusing account of astrological discussions in his second novel, *The Bachelor of Arts*.

Now married, Narayan began to earn a living as a journalist. *Swami and Friends* was still doing the rounds in London, with no success, and in desperation he wrote to a friend in Oxford, advising him that if the manuscript were to be returned to him from the publisher who was then considering it, he should weigh it down with a stone and throw it in the Thames. Fortunately the friend ignored this instruction and continued to show the manuscript to prospective publishers. Eventually he showed it to Graham

Greene, who was then living in Oxford and asked him to read it. It sat on Greene's desk for some weeks and then eventually, in one of those moments of great good fortune which occur from time to time in literary history, Greene was sufficiently excited by the book to recommend and secure its publication in October 1935. The publication of a first novel is one thing, security in the literary world is another. *Swami and Friends* was well-reviewed, but was not a commercial success. In the years that followed, Narayan had to seek a variety of different publishers, and it was to be some time before his reputation was secured amongst a wide international audience. His personal circumstances were also sometimes difficult. In 1939 his wife, Rajam, died of typhoid. Narayan was devastated. In *My Days* he wrote:

> I have described this part of my experience of her sickness and death in *The English Teacher* so fully that I do not, and perhaps cannot, go over it again. More than any other book, *The English Teacher* is autobiographical in content, very little part of it being fiction. . . The toll that typhoid took and all the desolation that followed, with a child to look after, and the psychic adjustments, are based on my own experience.

After the publication of his fourth novel, *The English Teacher*, in 1949, Narayan's writing entered a period of greater maturity and confidence. The autobiographical element which had been so obvious in his earlier writing became less prominent, allowing him to develop his characters more freely. With the growing critical success of his novels in the West, he began to lead the life of the successful literary figure both in India and abroad.

He travelled widely and, in time, was showered with honours. He did not leave his accustomed milieu, though, which was Mysore, where he built himself a house, went for rambling and talkative walks, and savoured the quotidian pursuits of life, including agriculture, which he studied with interest. In 1989 he was appointed to membership of the Rajya Sabha, the Upper House of the Indian Parliament. His inaugural speech there was on the subject of Indian children. Children, he said, were being deprived of time to play or to look at birds and trees.

In 2001 he died. His mind was clear to the end, and on his death-bed he spoke of his desire to write another novel. This was the man who had confessed to friends: 'I have become lazy since I entered my nineties.'

Narayan's novels are sometimes described as simple. The prose is indeed limpid, the descriptions clear, and the emphasis is on direct and intelligible storytelling, invoking a cast of vivid characters. To the modern reader, accustomed to artifice and allusion, this may give the books a slightly dated feel, and yet it is this quality of simplicity and directness which makes them such fine works of art. Narayan is a storyteller first and foremost, a characteristic which puts him in the company of the great nineteenth-century novelists as well as those twentiethcentury writers, such as Somerset Maugham, who believed that the novelist's business is to narrate. His storytelling, though, sometimes has a somewhat rambling flavour, with plots that can wander and which sometimes betray an absence of resolution.

But this is not necessarily a flaw: real lives are often aimless and unresolved and when we read of such lives in literature we are quick to recognise their authenticity. There is nothing false in the world which Narayan creates – quite the opposite, in fact: these novels convey the taste and texture of India with a vividness which strikes the reader as utterly true.

Even those who have no first-hand experience of India will feel that what they experience in reading these books is a taste of the real place. The favoured setting of Narayan's novels is Malgudi, an was clear to the enimaginary town which he describes as having 'swum into view' when he sat down to write *Swami and Friends*. Malgudi provides the strong sense of place which suffuses these books. This is India distilled – an urban India, but one in which a hinterland of jungle, of small villages, of wide plains is still present. When we read about Malgudi we feel we are there, and this powerful impression is created not by detailed descriptions of the countryside or buildings, but by the characters themselves and the suggestive nature of their thought and their speech. It is the voice which is distinctive here. It is a voice which is rooted in a world-view quite different from that which we will encounter in, say, a modern novel located in North America or Western Europe. This voice is sensitive to a distinctive tradition in which the accumulated beliefs and social practices of centuries inform the smallest act. It is a wholly different way of looking at the world.

The four novels in this volume form the first phase of Narayan's career as a novelist. In them we see the author working through a number of concerns which, as a young man, were very much on his mind. These include boyhood (*Swami and Friends*), education and the finding of a role in life (*The Bachelor of Arts*), and marriage (*The Dark Room* and *The English Teacher*). In these early novels, we also see the development of Narayan as a writer, as he makes his way to the more mature and confident vision of the later novels. *Swami and Friends* is episodic in nature, which is exactly what the life of a young boy tends to be. Boys on the whole do not to have a long-term plan; they live for the moment, act on impulse, they pursue new enthusiasms and abandon old. Boyhood friendships, though, can persist, even if they may be tempestuous and competitive.

The portrayal of Swami's relationship with Rajam, the son of a senior police officer, reveals how posturing and social embarrassment can loom large in the dealings a boy has with his friends. So many of us can remember the strength of that childhood feeling that our friends have more impressive parents, houses, cars, than we do. Narayan paints a deft picture of that particular anxiety.

In *Swami and Friends* we are given an early sight of the humour which runs through Narayan's novels. One of the features of British colonialism was the export of cricket, a game which strikes North Americans as being opaque and slowmoving. But at the time that *Swami* was written, cricket was more than just a sport – it stood, quite absurdly, for the whole ethos of an empire. Thus although we see Swami raised to heights of indignation by a political orator who laments the passivity of his countrymen which has allowed them to be dominated by an alien power, when it comes to cricket the boy is sufficiently enthusiastic to spend some time trying to explain what the game is all about to his aged grandmother. This comic scene, like so much of Narayan's humour, has a strong poignancy to it. The grandmother represents the old India, a world in which cricket is not played. Her ignorance of the rules is a vivid metaphor for the extent to which the old and the new India are different worlds. The cricket episode also allows Narayan to portray the naive aspirations of the boys. This is a familiar theme in many of his works, where so many of the characters are striving for something which is often just beyond their grasp.

Narayan's second novel, *The Bachelor of Arts,* again contains autobiographical elements but is much more satisfying in its structure than *Swami*. Chandran, the protagonist of this novel, is a typical Narayan hero – he is modest, slightly at odds with his surroundings, and engaged in a search. The search in this case is for freedom, and it takes place in the face of all the constraints which the Hindu family and wider Indian society can place in the way of a young man eager to find himself. It is in this novel that we see one of Narayan's main preoccupations come to the fore. This is marriage, and the complexities that Indian marriage involved and, indeed, still involves.

Contemporary Westerners are sometimes astounded by the sheer fuss involved in an Indian marriage. In particular, the elaborate negotiations and the very large sums of money spent on celebrations impress outsiders, especially those who are accustomed to relatively informal weddings. The traditional Hindu marriage, however, is an altogether different thing from the typical arrangements of a Western couple: it involves the families on both sides, who are strongly interested in the suitability of the other side for a union. This means that the young man or young woman who nurtures hopes of a love-match, detached from considerations of social position or caste, may be heading for a major confrontation with family members who have very different ideas.

The Bachelor of Arts tells of a young man whose views of life, including marriage, are more 'modern' than those of his family. His relatives are immersed in the traditional beliefs of their religion: marriage is not a matter of personal choice, but something that is divinely ordained. As Chandran's mother points out to her son: 'It is all a matter of fate . . . You can marry only the person whom you are destined to marry and at the appointed time. When the time comes, let her be the ugliest girl, she will look all right to the destined eye.' And in a letter which he writes to Chandran's father, the intended bride's own father says: '. . . we can only propose. He on the Thirupathi Hills alone knows what is best for us.' When Chandran's horoscope is found to involve incompatibilities with that of the girl whom he wishes to marry, the full force of this fatalistic view of human affairs comes home to him. What can a young man do in such circumstances other than give in or defy the convictions of everybody about him? And the prospect of revolt defeats Chandran, who is ultimately drawn back into the world of family and tradition, even although he does succeed in negotiating for himself a certain freedom. This process of selfexploration, challenge, and finally reconciliation is a familiar theme in Narayan's fiction. In a sense it mirrors Narayan's own life as a man whose vision and understanding transported him beyond the rigid beliefs and practices of his society but never took him away from that society. And that central message – that we can be ourselves to an extent but that we all need to be anchored in society – is really a very attractive feature of these novels. Ultimately we feel comfortable and secure in reading Narayan because we detect in his work a resolution, an acceptance that we ourselves need in our own lives.

If there is a great deal of light and freedom in these two charming early novels, then in his third novel, *The Dark Room*, we enter graver, more disturbing territory. Marriage is the common theme of three of the novels in this collection, and in *The Dark Room*, which Narayan was to describe as an early women's liberation novel, we see how the traditional Hindu marriage could trap women in complete subservience. Savitri is married to a tin-god husband, Ramani, a man who runs a branch office of an insurance agency, who is prosperous enough to drive a car (remember that this novel was published in 1938), and who expects in his home-life to be danced attendance upon by his wife. The portrait of this domestic tyrant is a compelling one, and we are also appalled, but fascinated, by the coquettish Shanta Bai, with whom he starts an affair. The conduct of this affair is beautifully described as Narayan directs his gaze at the shoddiness and deception of the office romance.

At the end of the day the patient Savitri, driven to an attempt at suicide as the only way out of her intolerable situation, returns to the matrimonial home and her unapologetic husband, defeated by centuries of custom. Hers is an awful fate, and although the position of women in traditional societies has improved, we might leave this book remembering that there are many women for whom this story would still ring very true.

Marriage again plays a central role in *The English Teacher*. Narayan lost his wife to typhoid, and that is what happens to the central character, Krishna, in this novel. It is very sad, and very painful – just as it must have been for him in real life.

The grief here is described with great tenderness, in passages that are quite haunting in their simplicity. The prose is like a funeral bell: solemn and resonant. As in the earlier novels, the idea of acceptance looms large: ultimately the hero, Krishna, has to accept the fact of the loss of his wife and the loneliness that follows. He has fought against this brute fact by attempting to communicate with her through paranormal means, but this leads nowhere, in the same way as all the smoke and mirrors of the various mystic figures who parade through Malgudi seem ultimately to lead nowhere.

R. K. Narayan is a much beloved novelist, and for very good reason. Although the books in this volume were all written more than half a century ago, they are the freshest, the most sparkling of gems. The struggle of the characters against social restrictions, their struggle to be something other than that which social destiny appears to be forcing them to be, are struggles with which we can all identify to a greater or lesser extent. As Samuel Johnson observed, many people waste part of their lives trying to be something they are not. Eventually, of course, they may come to realise what they really are, and if that happens to be a citizen of a small town, rather like Narayan's Malgudi, bound up with neighbours and their concerns, sewn into a family and a nation, then there are very much worse fates than that.

Although most of Narayan's critics acknowledge his excellence as a comicironist dealing with life's inherent absurdities and incongruities, they never cease to register a distinct note of dissent as regards his characterisation or the 'flat' characters in his novels. In fact Narayan's characters present a peculiar case. Having been created in the preordainedly conceived world, they neither show any sign of apparent growth in their natural attitude or outlook. However, the Narayan characters, particularly the protagonists, seem to be growing on a different plane of realisation which, being mostly spiritual, remains imperceptible. Forster's terms, 'flat' and 'round,' although useful as points of reference, remain inadequate in the context of the typical Narayan characters. Other Western critics like Edwin Muir, Mary McCarthy and W.J. Harvey, although offer valuable pointers and, in fact, seem to defend the unchanging and undeveloping characters, may not be of much help to deal with the Narayan characters characteristically realised through the cultural ethos and seem to suggest spiritual growth. Finally, even the existing Narayan criticism, despite the wider perspective it offers to understand the Narayan character, remains inadequate mainly because of its disparate nature. It is here that the idea for a new framework to deal with the typical characters in the Narayan novels is conceived.

What in fact begins as a common need for a device to deal with the traditionally conceived and realised characters in the novels of Narayan, eventually becomes a necessity for a much wider framework to underline the essentials of the novelist, synoptically though. Thus, what seems to have been conceived, in the final analysis, is a kind of three-tier framework which may be able to (a) deal with most of the Narayan characters and present them with their traditional trappings, (b) underline different modes used by the novelist to reveal the character-roles in the novels, and (c) note the world view of the novelist.

It may be essential to make a brief note of a sort of backdrop against which this framework operates. Narayan imbibes the spirit of his culture. His indomitable faith in the eternal spirit of India, his firm belief in the preordained and karma-operating world, his high regard for the ancient Shastras and his philosophy of acceptance and quietism clearly reflect the sacrosanct tradition he belongs to. The characters in his novels not only imbibe the creator's spirit but are also realised through it. Logically enough, in their world of acceptance rebellion has hardly any meaning: in fact it is considered as cultural aberration. And if found rebelling, the characters finally withdraw from it and return to the world of sanity. This basic trait of the Malgudi character forms the basic of the present study.

The typological study is designed as a character-oriented approach. Narayan's novels are novels of character and, significantly, the novelist has always tried to explore human existence with its elemental issues through the central consciousness of his novel. The character-oriented approach may be taken as a device to focus on Narayan's character delineation and to analyse the characteristics of the so-called flat character.

The typology underlines four major types of characters in Narayan's novels the types seem to have a distinct identity bespeaking the mark of Narayanesque conception of character and may show kinship with the other types underlined by Forster, Ben Jonson, Frye, Scholes and Kellog. The four types in the present study are: innocent, rebel, eccentric and sanyasi. Taken in their wider sense, the typological characters may also show kinship with their prototypes in the works of other writers. The children in the typology of innocence may be compared with the children in Lord of the Flies and Marco as a cuckold, in the typology of eccentricity, may be cast against Casaubon in Middlemarch.

The typological study runs into six chapters. The first chapter opens with a focus on the legendary image of Narayan, underlining the salient features of his craft. It also presents a review of the representative Narayan-criticism, a brief note on character criticism followed by Narayan's views on character. Finally, it argues out the case in favour of a new approach, defining the terms to be used in the book and underlining its modus operandi.

Although every Malgudi character has 'a nuclear innocence,' the second chapter deals with only those characters who are basically realised through innocence. Understandably the frame focuses on the children in Narayan, underlining the Blakean and the Wordsworthian sense of innocence and projecting the incorruptible and untainted human consciousness. The chapter also deals with the characters realised through their 'second childhood' and the rustics playing the collective unconscious reflecting the traditional morality. Taken in its entirety the chapter comments on the nature and treatment of innocence in the novels of Narayan.

The third chapter considers the concept of rebellion in Narayan's novels. A close study of the central characters in the Malgudi novels reveals that rebellion is realised more as a deviation from the traditional codes than as a defiance. It is underlined that beneath the veneer of rebellion, in all the novels, runs the theme of illusion versus reality. Rebellion seems to be Narayan's strategy to reiterate his philosophy of acceptance and quietism realised through the device of rite de passage. The chapter considers the protagonists' middle-class milieu, the essentially sacrosanct tradition they belong to, and the myths as the most important influence making the rebels withdraw from the deviation and accept sane normalcy in life. Finally, it has been possible to note the spiritual growth through the reiterative theme of most of the Malgudi novels: the return of the native.

The fourth chapter underlines the notion of eccentricity in the Malgudi novels. The typology presents a bizarre kind of human spectacle. Most of the eccentrics playing different roles e.g. the protagonist's alter-ego, or catalyst or 'ficelle' become the source of the comic laughter with a ring of sadness. In the final analysis, if the typology of eccentricity mirrors Narayan's thoughtful laughter, it may also be taken as the novelist's strategy to present life's inherent absurdities and inconsistencies.

The fifth chapter focuses on the fourth frame of the typological study: the role of sanyasa in Narayan's novels. As Narayan presents every conceivable face of a sanyasi, from the fake and the sceptic to the symbolic and the full-fledged one, he seems to be stressing the traditionally acknowledged spiritual significance of renunciation realised through his characteristic irony. Finally, sanyasa seems to be Narayan's yet another strategy to realise the basic theme in his novels: illusion versus reality underlining the assertion of the ordinary over the extraordinary.

As the typological approach seems to be viewing the entire Malgudi humanity through its four houses, the seemingly compartmentalised study may appear rather unusual. It may, however, be pointed out that although human characters are rarely realised through a single trait of their personality, it seems to be the prerogative of the writer to telescope and illumine a single dominant trait of his characters. Such characters in Narayan, realised basically as types may occupy the individual houses the family frames with natural ease. The full-fledged character in Narayan, however, may be seen occupying more than one house. For such characters one may add that it is probable to see one individual playing more than one life-role during the entire span of his/her life. And even Shakespeare seems to endorse this view as he says (in As You Like It): 'And one man in his time plays many parts.'

The last chapter draws conclusions as emerging from the overall typological study. The conclusions are considered under a three-tier analysis: the milieu, the mode and the mind. Narayan may basically be regarded as a delineator of middle-class people. In fact, the middle class constitutes the matrix of all the Malgudi novels. It offers the novelist excellent material to dramatise his conception of humanity and the notion of man's existence. In the final analysis it may be said that Narayan's middle class, acquiring representativeness and universal tone, seems to present the 'theatre of the absurd,' to stress the preordainedly conceived universe, to underline the sanity of the tradition and finally to explore the myth of the flat character and to note its subtle growth of consciousness.

As regards the mode, the typology telescopes irony as the overall strategy the novelist employs for the delineation of his characters. In fact it is through the device of irony that Narayan seems to underline the essentially paradoxical and contradictory nature of life. The typology also notes Narayan's strategic use of comedy, as a mode, to stress the inherent incongruity and inconsistency in life. In the final analysis Narayan's serious comedy seems to have become a maturing school and a redeeming agent for the folly-proned protagonist, and seems to imbibe the celebrative and continuity principle of life.

The last tier of the conclusion, the mind, considers Narayan's world-view. Narayan seems to regard the world as lila or maya, human life as a game of shadows and man as a mere role player. In the preordainedly conceived world human life runs according to the inexorable law of Karma; Nature is realised with its inherent power of establishing peace in the temporarily disrupted order of the world. The tradition remains sacrosanct and the Shastras have irrefutable supremacy in life.

It is hoped that the traditionally conceived typological study may be regarded as a viable approach to the understanding of Narayan as it seems to underline the essentials in the art of his novel. The essentials reflected in the corpus of the Narayan novel may be summed up as:

Narayan's presentment of the epic of the commonplace, his bifocal vision of comic irony to view the human predicament and, finally, his positive vision of life despite its Mayaic conception.

2

Humanism in R. K. Narayan

Humanism is basically a philosophical outlook centered on the authority of human being as a dignified, rational being. Humanism's final court of appeal is human reason rather that any external authority. Its spirit is secular, liberal and tolerant. The humanists through their scholarship and learning registered their protest against socio-political and religious establishments. The emulation of the ancient writers is no longer a dominant force in literature but humanistic ideals are still influential in modern thought.

R.K. Narayan is not only a novelist whose fourteen novels span the last fifty years of India's history; he is a humanist who draws the best possible picture of contemporary Indian middle class families.

This work deals with Narayan's approach to his own Indian civilisation which he describes as threatened from within (a slumbering routine seems to have overtaken every activity), and from without (the West increasingly makes its way into the country).

Narayan's unique use of English and his treatment of the novel as a form of art are analysed, along with the author's evolution, as he describes the problems of Indian individuals faced with an uncertain future in a fast changing society. R. K. Narayan's novels are like a box of Indian sweets: a highly coloured container conceals a range of delectable treats, all different in a subtle way, but each one clearly from the same place. There are fourteen novels in the oeuvre, enough to create a world. Enthusiasts of his work will read them all and return to them time and again. The busy, or the less committed, may open the box and take out one at random – it does not really matter which order one reads them in. But be warned: the consumption of one leads to a strong craving for more.

Narayan's life spanned the twentieth century, which meant that he belonged both to an old world and a new. At the time of his birth in the British Raj, that astonishing imperial conceit, was firmly in place, as were those ironclad notions of caste that were to prove so difficult to shrug. The British presence in India had brought with it a large civil service, an educational system, and railways – to all of which institutions the people of the subcontinent took with enthusiasm. But it had also brought with it a language, and the literature which that language created, and it is this which proved a most productive legacy. The British took English to India and the Indians gave back a literary tradition which continues to delight and enrich us to this day. Contemporary writers such as Vikram Seth, Rohinton Mistry, or Anita Desai, whose novels have given such pleasure to readers in Europe and North America, stand rooted in a tradition which R. K. Narayan, as one of the earlier Indian novelists to write in English, did a great deal to establish.

Although Narayan did not draw attention to his personal life, he did write a memoir, My Days, which tells us a great deal about his boyhood years and the inception and development of his literary career. His childhood was fairly typical of that of a middle-class boy of the time. His father was the headmaster of a school, a somewhat stern figure in his professional life, and this connection with the world of education is very much apparent in the earlier novels, where schools, colleges, and the whole business of becoming educated play a major role. His father's job required mobility, and Narayan spent a number of childhood years living with his grandmother in Madras.

Eventually, though, he joined his parents in Mysore, where he attended the school presided over by his father.

He became a voracious reader, wading through the books and magazines which arrived on his father's desk for the school library. As he wrote in My Days: My father did not mind our taking away whatever we wanted to read provided we put them back on his desk without spoiling them, as they had to be placed on the school's reading-room table on Monday morning. So our week-end reading was full and varied. We could dream over the advertisement pages in the Boys' Own Paper or the Strand Magazine. Through the Strand we made the acquaintance of all English writers: Conan Doyle, Wodehouse, W.W. Jacobs, Arnold Bennett, and every English fiction writer worth the name . . . Through Harper's and the Atlantic, and American Mercury we attained glimpses of the New World and its writers.

This sense of distance, of being a participant in a culture and yet not being of it, is a familiar feature of the literature of what is now the British Commonwealth and it is vividly portrayed in Narayan's novels. Colonialism hurt and damaged those subjected to it, but it would be inaccurate to portray the process as being a simple matter of subjugation and humiliation; it was far more complex than that. The writer in the colonised country tended to soak up the culture of the colonial power and feel a familiarity and some affection for it, even though the experience of colonialism may have demoralised and destabilised his own colonised culture. This damage, although it may later be seen for what it is, is passed over: in his mind he is a member-in-waiting of a broader community of letters.

His aspirations, though, are likely to be dashed; his yearning unfulfilled. Although he may not realise it, the metropolitan culture is largely indifferent to him and his world: the literary circles after which he yearns are distant, impossibly out of reach. Of course, the conquest is feasible, and literary doors may open. Narayan himself made it, as did others, although some did so by leaving the culture in which they had been brought up. Narayan remained in India – an Indian writer who was happy to be read by those outside

India but who remained firmly within the world into which he had been born.

The young Narayan was not a great scholar. Having failed his university entrance examinations, he spent a year reading and writing before he eventually succeeded in being admitted to the B.A. course at Maharaja's College. During this year he acquired a copy of a book called How to Sell your Manuscripts and started to send his literary efforts to magazines in London. He met with no success, encountering for the first time those pieces of paper so familiar, and yet so devastating, to the aspiring writer – the printed rejection slip. In due course he completed his studies and graduated as a Bachelor of Arts.

There then followed various attempts by his father and others to secure him a position. These were mostly unsuccessful, although they eventually bore fruit in the shape of a teaching post where he was immediately required to teach Tennyson's Morte d'Arthur to a class of burly and uncooperative boys who had no interest in poetry. His teaching career was a dismal failure and shortly afterwards he walked out of the school and returned home. That was that: he would become a writer.

How many have made that decision, and how many have failed. And how many aspiring writers have written their first novel in the belief that it is fiction, only to discover that it is really about them, and, quite commonly, about their childhood.

Swami and Friends, Narayan's first novel, is a novel of boyhood which draws heavily on his own experiences. Narayan sent the typescript to a series of publishers in London and became accustomed to having it returned at regular intervals. He experienced similar rejection with the short stories which he was now writing, although he eventually succeeded in his ambition to get into print abroad when a piece he wrote for Punch magazine in London was accepted and produced a handsome fee of six guineas.

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Narayan was to use this small measure of success to persuade his future father-in-law that the financial prospects of a writer were not entirely gloomy. But he needed more than this: the unsuitability of his horoscope was seen by his intended bride's family as being a major drawback to a possible match, and it was only after lengthy discussions that the marriage was able to go ahead. Narayan's personal experience of the vagaries of matrimonial astrology was later reflected in the highly amusing account of astrological discussions in his second novel, The Bachelor of Arts.

Now married, Narayan began to earn a living as a journalist. Swami and Friends was still doing the rounds in London, with no success, and in desperation he wrote to a friend in Oxford, advising him that if the manuscript were to be returned to him from the publisher who was then considering it, he should weigh it down with a stone and throw it in the Thames. Fortunately the friend ignored this instruction and continued to show the manuscript to prospective publishers. Eventually he showed it to Graham Greene, who was then living in Oxford, and asked him to read it. It sat on Greene's desk for some weeks and then eventually, in one of those moments of great good fortune which occur from time to time in literary history, Greene was sufficiently excited by the book to recommend and secure its publication in October.

The publication of a first novel is one thing, security in the literary world is another. Swami and Friends was well-reviewed, but was not a commercial success. In the years that followed, Narayan had to seek a variety of different publishers, and it was to be some time before his reputation was secured amongst a wide international audience. His personal circumstances were also sometimes difficult. His wife, Rajam, died of typhoid. Narayan was devastated. In My Days he wrote: I have described this part of my experience of her sickness and death in The English Teacher so fully that I do not, and perhaps cannot, go over it again. More than any other book, The English Teacher is autobiographical in content, very little part of it being fiction . . . The toll that typhoid took and all the desolation that followed, with a child to look after, and the psychic adjustments, are based on my own experience.

After the publication of his fourth novel, The English Teacher, Narayan's writing entered a period of greater maturity and confidence. The autobiographical element which had been so obvious in his earlier writing became less prominent, allowing him to develop his characters more freely. With the growing critical success of his novels in the West, he began to lead the life of the successful literary figure both in India and abroad.

He travelled widely and, in time, was showered with honours. He did not leave his accustomed milieu, though, which was Mysore, where he built himself a house, went for rambling and talkative walks, and savoured the quotidian pursuits of life, including agriculture, which he studied with interest. He was appointed to membership of the Rajya Sabha, the Upper House of the Indian Parliament. His inaugural speech there was on the subject of Indian children. Children, he said, were being deprived of time to play or to look at birds and trees.

His mind was clear to the end, and on his death-bed he spoke of his desire to write another novel. This was the man who had confessed to friends: 'I have become lazy since I entered my nineties.' Narayan's novels are sometimes described as simple. The prose is indeed limpid, the descriptions clear, and the emphasis is on direct and intelligible storytelling, invoking a cast of vivid characters. To the modern reader, accustomed to artifice and allusion, this may give the books a slightly dated feel, and yet it is this quality of simplicity and directness which makes them such fine works of art. Narayan is a storyteller first and foremost, a characteristic which puts him in the company of the great nineteenth-century novelists as well as those twentieth century writers, such as Somerset

Maugham, who believed that the novelist's business is to narrate. His storytelling, though, sometimes has a somewhat rambling flavour, with plots that can wander and which sometimes betray an absence of resolution.

But this is not necessarily a flaw: real lives are often aimless and unresolved, and when we read of such lives in literature we are quick to recognise their authenticity. There is nothing false in the world which Narayan creates – quite the opposite, in fact: these novels convey the taste and texture of India with a vividness which strikes the reader as utterly true. Even those who have no first-hand experience of India will feel that what they experience in reading these books is a taste of the real place.

The favoured setting of Narayan's novels is Malgudi, an imaginary town which he describes as having 'swum into view' when he sat down to write Swami and Friends. Malgudi provides the strong sense of place. This is India distilled – an urban India, but one in which a hinterland of jungle, of small villages, of wide plains is still present.

When we read about Malgudi we feel we are there, and this powerful impression is created not by detailed descriptions of the countryside or buildings, but by the characters themselves and the suggestive nature of their thought and their speech. It is the voice which is distinctive here. It is a voice which is rooted in a world-view quite different from that which we will encounter in, say, a modern novel located in North America or Western Europe. This voice is sensitive to a distinctive tradition in which the accumulated beliefs and social practices of centuries inform the smallest act. It is a wholly different way of looking at the world.

The four novels in this volume form the first phase of Narayan's career as a novelist. In them we see the author working through a number of concerns which, as a young man, were very much on his mind.

These include boyhood (Swami and Friends), education and the finding of a role in life (The Bachelor of Arts), and marriage (The Dark Room and The English Teacher). In these early novels, we also see the development of Narayan as a writer, as he makes his way to the more mature and confident vision of the later novels. Swami and Friends is episodic in nature, which is exactly what the life of a young boy tends to be. Boys on the whole do not to have a long-term plan; they live for the moment, act on impulse, they pursue new enthusiasms and abandon old. Boyhood friendships, though, can persist, even if they may be tempestuous and competitive.

The portrayal of Swami's relationship with Rajam, the son of a senior police officer, reveals how posturing and social embarrassment can loom large in the dealings a boy has with his friends. So many of us can remember the strength of that childhood feeling that our friends have more impressive parents, houses, cars, than we do. Narayan paints a deft picture of that particular anxiety.

In Swami and Friends we are given an early sight of the humour which runs through Narayan's novels. One of the features of British colonialism was the export of cricket, a game which strikes North Americans as being opaque and slow-moving. But at the time that Swami was written, cricket was more than just a sport, it stood, quite absurdly, for the whole ethos of an empire. Thus although we see Swami raised to heights of indignation by a political orator who laments the passivity of his countrymen which has allowed them to be dominated by an alien power, when it comes to cricket the boy is sufficiently enthusiastic to spend some time trying to explain what the game is all about to his aged grandmother. This comic scene, like so much of Narayan's humour, has a strong poignancy to it. The grandmother represents the old India, a world in which cricket is not played.

Her ignorance of the rules is a vivid metaphor for the extent to which the old and the new India are different worlds. The cricket episode also allows Narayan to portray the naive aspirations of the boys. This is a familiar theme in many of his works, where so many of the characters are striving for something which is often just beyond their grasp.

Narayan's second novel, The Bachelor of Arts, again contains autobiographical elements but is much more satisfying in its structure than Swami. Chandran, the protagonist of this novel, is a typical Narayan hero – he is modest, slightly at odds with his surroundings, and engaged in a search. The search in this case is for freedom, and it takes place in the face of all the constraints which the Hindu family and wider Indian society can place in the way of a young man eager to find himself. It is in this novel that we see one of Narayan's main preoccupations come to the fore. This is marriage, and the complexities that Indian marriage involved and, indeed, still involves.

Contemporary Westerners are sometimes astounded by the sheer fuss involved in an Indian marriage. In particular, the elaborate negotiations and the very large sums of money spent on celebrations impress outsiders, especially those who are accustomed to relatively informal weddings. The traditional Hindu marriage, however, is an altogether different thing from the typical arrangements of a Western couple: it involves the families on both sides, who are strongly interested in the suitability of the other side for a union. This means that the young man or young woman who nurtures hopes of a love-match, detached from considerations of social position or caste, may be heading for a major confrontation with family members who have very different ideas.

The Bachelor of Arts tells of a young man whose views of life, including marriage, are more 'modern' than those of his family. His relatives are immersed in the traditional beliefs of their religion: marriage is not a matter of personal choice, but something that is divinely ordained. As Chandran's mother points out to her son: 'It is all a matter of fate . . . You can marry only the person whom you are destined to marry and at the appointed time. When the time comes, let her be the ugliest girl, she will look all right to the destined eye.' And in a letter which he writes to Chandran's father, the intended bride's own father says: '. . . we can only propose. He on the Thirupathi Hills alone knows what is best for us.'

When Chandran's horoscope is found to involve incompatibilities with that of the girl whom he wishes to marry, the full force of this fatalistic view of human affairs comes home to him. What can a young man do in such circumstances other than give in or defy the convictions of everybody about him? And the prospect of revolt defeats Chandran, who is ultimately drawn back into the world of family and tradition, even although he does succeed in negotiating for himself a certain freedom.

This process of selfexploration, challenge, and finally reconciliation is a familiar theme in Narayan's fiction. In a sense it mirrors Narayan's own life as a man whose vision and understanding transported him beyond the rigid beliefs and practices of his society but never took him away from that society. And that central message – that we can be ourselves to an extent but that we all need to be anchored in society – is really a very attractive feature of these novels. Ultimately we feel comfortable and secure in reading Narayan because we detect in his work a resolution, an acceptance that we ourselves need in our own lives.

If there is a great deal of light and freedom in these two charming early novels, then in his third novel, The Dark Room, we enter graver, more disturbing territory. Marriage is the common theme of three of the novels in this collection, and in The Dark Room, which Narayan was to describe as an early women's liberation novel, we see how the traditional Hindu marriage could trap women in complete subservience. Savitri is married to a tin-god husband, Ramani, a man who runs a branch office of an insurance agency, who is prosperous enough to drive a car (remember that this novel was published, and who expects in his home-life to be danced attendance upon by his wife. The portrait of this domestic tyrant is a compelling one, and we are also appalled, but fascinated, by the coquettish Shanta Bai, with whom he starts an affair. The conduct of this affair is beautifully described as Narayan directs his gaze at the shoddiness and deception of the office romance.

At the end of the day the patient Savitri, driven to an attempt at suicide as the only way out of her intolerable situation, returns to the matrimonial home and her unapologetic husband, defeated by centuries of custom. Hers is an awful fate, and although the position of women in traditional societies has improved, we might leave this book remembering that there are many women for whom this story would still ring very true.

Marriage again plays a central role in The English Teacher. Narayan lost his wife to typhoid, and that is what happens to the central character, Krishna, in this novel. It is very sad, and very painful, just as it must have been for him in real life.

The grief here is described with great tenderness, in passages that are quite haunting in their simplicity. The prose is like a funeral bell: solemn and resonant. As in the earlier novels, the idea of acceptance looms large: ultimately the hero, Krishna, has to accept the fact of the loss of his wife and the loneliness that follows. He has fought against this brute fact by attempting to communicate with her through paranormal means, but this leads nowhere, in the same way as all the smoke and mirrors of the various mystic figures who parade through Malgudi seem ultimately to lead nowhere.

R. K. Narayan is a much beloved novelist, and for very good reason. Although the books in this volume were all written more than half a century ago, they are the freshest, the most sparkling of gems.

The struggle of the characters against social restrictions, their struggle to be something other than that which social destiny appears to be forcing them to be, are struggles with which we can all identify to a greater or lesser extent. As Samuel Johnson observed, many people waste part of their lives trying to be something they are not. Eventually, of course, they may come to realise what they really are, and if that happens to be a citizen of a small town, rather like Narayan's Malgudi, bound up with neighbours and their concerns, sewn into a family and a nation, then there are very much worse fates than that.

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R. K. Narayan: Critics Point of View

"There is but one art, to omit!" noted Robert Louis Stevenson many years before R.K. Narayan was born and grown into a publishable writer. "Oh, if I knew how to omit I would ask no other knowledge. A man who knows how to omit would make an 'Iliad' of a daily paper." Out of such knowledge and secret was born Malgudi, India's best-known, best-loved fictional town and the lovely, grave as well as comedy-laden, art and voice of its literary creator who is widely regarded as India's greatest writer in English of the twentieth century.

All of Narayan's fiction testifies to this secret knowledge, as does much of his non-fiction. His writing career was exceptionally long lasting, encompassing seven decades. His literary output is rich and varied -15 novels, all but one set in Malgudi; scores of short stories, the best of them offered in two collections, Malgudi Days (1982) and Under the Banyan Tree and Other Stories (1985); retellings of Indian epics and mythology; travelogues; essays; and an acclaimed autobiography, My Days, published in 1974.

Like many a writer, Narayan went through a period of derivative, footloose, "unclassifiable" experimentation before he discovered his metier. But that the literary secret he prized above all else was the art of omission and that he held this knowledge in his hands even in September 1930, when be began writing his first novel, Swami and Friends (1935), is modestly intimated in the autobiography: "I began to notice that the sentences acquired a new strength and finality while being rewritten, and the real, final version could emerge only between the original lines and then again in what developed in he jumble of rewritten lines, and above and below them.

It was, on the whole, a pleasant experience... In July 1983, in a conversation with a group of American teachers who managed to meet him in Mysore, the writer was lured into a discussion of this secret by a question on how he had managed to create complex and fascinating books without relying on long narration: "I always blue pencil anything that seems at all repetitive."

Interestingly, a few months before Swami and Friends (1935) was published in England, Narayan's 'discoverer' and literary promoter, Graham Greene, had in a letter expressed practical anxieties about the brevity of the debutant's work: "I think if we fail to get it published, it will be chiefly because of its length; 50,000 words is awkwardly short. It may seem foolish that good work should not be published because it isn't padded out to 70,000, but that's how the racket is run..." It is a measure of Narayan's artistic integrity that not once during an exceptionally long writing career was he tempted to compromise with 'the racket', even if he proved adept at learning the ropes of professional writing. This combination of integrity and practicality must have particularly pleased Greene, who staunchly appreciated and protected his only-slightly-younger protege. Contrasting with the style and approach with which Narayan seemed to arrive, readymade, on the world literary stage was the plenitude of material that seemed always at hand. In 1962, when Ved Mehta asked Narayan in New York if he was ever oppressed by a sense of diminishing literary powers, the novelist came up with an answer that was only half-joking: "I really have more stories than I can write in a lifetime, and probably in the next janma I will be not an author but a publisher... How nice it would be to live in Malgudi." In his September 1981 Author's

Introduction to the splendid short story collection, Malgudi Days (1982), Narayan returned to this theme of the richness and diversity of story material India offered any perceptive writer who had the technical competence to work on the ideas:

"The material available to a story writer in India is limitless. Within a broad climate of inherited culture there are endless variations: every individual differs from every other individual, not only economically, but in outlook, habits and day-to-day philosophy. It is stimulating to live in a society that is not standardised or mechanised, and is free from monotony. Under such conditions the writer has only to look out of the window to pick up a character (and thereby a story)."

Narayan placed a high value on spontaneity and 'non-deliberateness' in fiction. Any knowledge of his fiction reveals that he is the most unselfconscious of writers. He has himself explained, on more than one occasion, how as a writer he let things run their course, allowing characters to surface or ideas to develop without 'deliberateness' of any kind.

But all this understates, in a crucial respect, what Narayan came to believe a good novelist needed. The art of omission, a plenitude of story material wherever you look, perceptivity, and unselfconsciousness and non-deliberateness in the writing are necessary and vital, but still insufficient conditions for mastery of his kind of literary art. This is made clear in an insight he offered Ved Mehta in 1962: "To be a good writer anywhere, you must have roots - both in religion and family. I have these things..." The idea of being rooted in a society and civilisation in one own's culture, traditions, values, changing local milieu, modernity and family, and among one's own people, is important to Narayan's development as a writer, and also to his assessment of other writers. "His writing is interesting," he would remark to me about some writer." But you can see the writer has no roots." In his last novel, The Grandmother's Tale, the writer refers paranthetically to a mid-1980s visit to Number One, Vellala Street, Purasawalkam, Madras, where he had been born and raised. My friend N. Ram (of The Hindu) was also curious to see the house and the environs as I described it in My Days... We... found no trace of the old house. It was totally demolished... Among the debris we found the old massive main door lying... Ram made an offer for it on the spot and immediately transported it to his house, where he has mounted it as a showpiece.

There is a tendency among a few younger writers of Indian origin to denigrate the literary art and achievement of Narayan. Among other things, his style is held to be 'pedestrian,' 'metronomic,' 'predictable,' 'limited and conventional,' and 'impoverished.' But there can be no serious question about where Narayan stands in the literary world, especially in relation to his detractors.

His international standing is expressed in the fact that his novels, short stories and retellings of Indian epics and myths can be read in most of the world's major languages; that his fiction has been the subject of a substantial scholarly and critical literature produced over several decades; and that elaborate literary tributes have appeared in the world's media following his death on May 13. He was nominated on more than one occasion for the Nobel Prize, although like his friend Greene, he did not win it. Narayan the most unpretentious and accessible of writers, is also regarded as a writer's writer with serious admirers and imitators in unexpected places in the world.

Narayan's fiction, deceptively simple and elusive in terms of literary theory and technique, is distinctive for its voice, its fusion of the comic with the sad, and its philosophical depth. He is famed for his lightness of touch and a style that is lean, lucid, undecorated, but wonderfully expressive and full of understated surprises. Narayan was a master of the 'clear glass' style long before that term of art was invented. "Since the death of Evelyn Waugh," declared Greene, "Narayan is the novelist I most admire in the English language." It was no small praise from one of the great writers of the twentieth century. For John Updike, Narayan's ability to convey the "colourful teeming" of his fictional town places him in the Dickensian tradition.

Youngest Brother and Cartoonist R.K. Laxman Comments

The remarkable thing about Narayan, master of the art of omission was that once he discovered his metier and his fictional town, he stayed with it for life. All his originality, inventiveness, imagination, and philosophical resources were invested in the space of his small town, now familiar to millions of people through the medium of television.

Narayan had a special ability to make the rhythms, intricacies and humanism of South Indian life accessible to people all over India and indeed to people of other cultures round the world. Central to this achievement was Malgudi, the fictional South Indian town, which he peopled with ordinary men and women made memorable by his art. The stuff of his fiction is the precise registration of the particular and the local, mediated by the art of omission - what a Narayan admirer, V.S. Naipaul, once called the life of "small men, small schemes, big talk, limited means."

"Whom next shall I meet in Malgudi?" was the thought that occurred to Greene when he finished reading, usually in manuscript, a Narayan novel. He knew that if he went out of the door into "those loved and shabby streets" of Malgudi, he could see "with excitement and a certainty of pleasure" a stranger approaching past the bank, the cinema and the haircutting saloon, "a stranger who will greet me I know with some unexpected and revealing phrase that will open a door on to yet another human experience."

It is 'voice' as much as anything else that defines our writer. Learned essays and treatises have been written about it. As has already been noted, Narayan's is a lovely, original, grave as well as humour-laden voice. In its registration of ordinary life in Malgudi, its unhurriedness, its imperturbable humour set against a "sad and poetic background," its many shades of irony, its never-heavy philosophising and its detachment and constancy, this voice seems to convey something universal. There is nothing false, strained, 'deliberate' about his fiction.

Narayan's view in novel after novel is completely objective. "This complete objectivity, this complete freedom from comment," noted Greene in his 1937 introduction to The Bachelor of Arts, "is the boldest gamble a novelist can take. If he allows himself to take side, moralise, propagand, he can easily achieve an extra-literary interest, but if he follows Mr. Narayan's method, he stakes all on his creative power. His characters must live, or else the book has no claim whatever on our interests. And how vividly Mr. Narayan's characters do live... "Greene, followed by various men and women of letters, saw in the "underlying sense of beauty and sadness" a parallel with Chekov.

Another dimension of Narayan's literary achievement needs to be highlighted. He was the first modern Indian writer to make a full-time career out of literature. He was, in fact, modern India's first successful professional writer. Early on, in the 1930s and 1940s, he acquired a knowledge of copyright law and issues, literary contracts and agency, and international publishing practices that was quite exceptional for an Indian writer of his generation. In laid-back Mysore, older authors like the philosopher M. Hiriyanna sought him out for technical advice on publishing contracts.

Graham Greene (1904-1991) was R.K. Narayan's 'discoverer' in the 1930s and the most important figure in his writing life. Their literary friendship was celebrated. When Narayan started out in the 1930s, he had no literary forebears or peers to relate to. When he was ready with his first novel, Swami and Friends, he could find neither a publisher nor a reading public. The India of the 1930s and early 1940s lacked an organised publishing industry. Writers who got published in newspapers or periodicals were paid essentially small change. The absence of a significant book-buying public for Indian fiction in English must have been enormously discouraging.

It was a real struggle for the first 20 years. But Narayan never wavered, never deviated from the decision he made early on that the only life for him was that of a writer. Recalling that decision made around 1929-30, he once remarked to me: "I wonder how I had the foolhardiness to make such a crazy decision! I don't think I could do it again if I had to make a choice." This part-joking, part-serious remark seemed to capture the essence of Narayan's early life as a writer. He summed it up for his biographers: "Good reviews, poor sales and a family to support."

Once he made his "foolhardy" decision to be nothing if not a writer, he went about it with dedication, modesty, independence, integrity and, eventually, solid literary success. His inner directedness kept him going during the early years. What helped sustain him during this period was the support of a small circle of admiring friends, the joint family safety net, and the remarkable solidarity and practical help extended by Greene, sight unseen, thousands of miles away. In My Days, Narayan fondly recalls the "pleasant experience" of his early, struggling days as a writer. He notes that this quality of experience is "later lost, to an extent, when one becomes established, with some awareness of one's publishers, methods, transactions, the trappings of publicity and reviews, and above all a public."

On October 10, 1906, the writer was born as Rasipuram Krishnaswami Iyer Narayanaswami, a name that appears on his degree certificate given in 1930. In 1935, for literary convenience, Narayanaswami, the given name, was shortened to Narayan at the instance of Greene and the publisher Hamish Hamilton.

Kittu Purna was the good fairy who made his mission to get Narayan into print in England. He brought Greene and Narayan together in the 1930s. Narayan's first fifteen years, spent under the supervision of a distinguished grandmother, Ammani, in Madras while the rest of his family lived in princely Mysore, stands out for the unusual quality of the beginnings of a writer. The link between the quality of childhood and adult creativity is now well recognised. Narayan's was a wonder-filled childhood anchored in a capacious, sociable, enlightened middle class home environment in an ancient, socially mixed, but changing quarter of a great city. It was an upbringing under somewhat straitened economic circumstances.

That our writer was an exceptional child, not in the least for academic reasons, cannot be missed by anyone who reads the autobiography, My Days, the biography, R.K. Narayan: The Early Years - 1906-1945, and Swami and Friends as well as several of the short stories. From his maternal grandmother, the child Narayan absorbed folk-tales, a fluent narrative tradition, and an appreciation of Carnatic music. A talented uncle, T.N. Seshachalam, impecunious, idealistic and committed to classical Tamil literature as well as to Shakespeare, instilled in him values that endured and influenced his outlook as a writer, especially in the later years. Seshachalam's younger brother, on the other hand, would prove a fount of character material for the future writer.

What is clear is that the writer's childhood in Purasawalkam, Madras provided much capital for creativity. The adult Narayan would never lose contact with this quality of experience and even in old age he kept returning, imaginatively and sometimes literally, to the scene of his childhood. Narayan put forward to one of his biographers the theory that even with the passing of many decades, "we are what we are. Whether you grow older, more decrepit, inside, the sense of awareness, of being, is the same throughout. I don't see any difference between myself when I was seven years old in Madras and now here in Mysore. The chap inside is the same, unchanged." This artistic perception of continuity of inner being and experience is, at the very least, unusual.

The birth of Malgudi and the development of the writer's vision and voice cannot be separated from the exceptional, wonder-filled child growing up in early-twentieth century Madras.

"Thus ended one phase of my life as a man of Madras; I became a Mysorean thenceforth," remarks the writer in his autobiography, referring to the year 1921. This transition and transformation were of great significance to Narayan's evolution into a full-time writer. For one thing, the rules of the game changed significantly for our young man.

In Mysore the adolescent Narayan was enrolled in the Maharaja's Collegiate High School where his father, R.V. Krishnaswami Iyer, was headmaster. The young man was captivated by the city's green open spaces and eloquent landscape dominated by the rise of Chamundi Hill. He became part of a large, lively family. The parents were highly principled, had a strong belief in the value of education, and shared a liberal perspective on life that worked against orthodoxy, religious and social.

While the father was a disciplinarian at school and generally kept a distance from his sons (as was the practice of those days), Gnanambal, Narayan's mother, brought to her marriage and family an abundance of robust common sense, sociability and a broad, democratic and compassionate outlook. For many years, she was the hub around which the family revolved. Narayan would later describe his mother, who like him lived into her nineties, as "a very rare soul, plain-dealing, transparent and absolutely committed to truth-telling."

Theirs was a trilingual household. Tamil was spoken within the house and Kannada socially (by the younger generation) with an expanding circle of friends and acquaintances, while correct English usage became almost a family obsession. The children's interest in English literature was reinforced by their unlimited access to the library in the school of which their father was headmaster. Regular inflows of journals from England kept Narayan and his siblings abreast of the London literary scene of the 1920s. For the future writer, this access to informed comment and criticism, and to a broad range of writing, proved important. It clearly influenced his outlook and his sensibility. He became more discerning in his reading, acquiring a critical sense. At the end of his school career, Narayan twice failed his University entrance examination, the first time actually in English. This two-year respite from formal education allowed him to read, muse, take long walks, savour nature, and try his hand at writing. In his autobiography, he describes his first literary efforts as "totally unclassifiable - neither poetry nor prose nor fiction." (Although some of them are still extant, the writer did not want them published.)

On hand was a small, but encouraging audience. The writer would read his works aloud not only to his brother R.K. Srinivasan (Seenu), an always-appreciative listener, but also to the select group of friends who accompanied him on walks and for whom he would buy coffee as a tactical investment against hostile reactions. Once the pieces were typed they were dispatched to various publishers, mostly in England, and the author acquired an impressive collection of rejection slips in various colours and styles, "cold, callous...impersonal and mocking." None of these first efforts would make it to print.

After finally gaining admission to Maharaja's College, Mysore, where he read History, Economics, Political Science, English and Tamil and was taught by British as well as Indian professors, he found little of interest in the formal curriculum. College life, however, proved absorbing. He made new friends and found among the teaching staff and fellow students characters who would later make an entry into his fiction. During this period, he wrote his first short stories.

To no one's particular dismay, Narayan failed his B.A. History paper in the first attempt and had to take it again. Claiming his B.A. in 1930, he was pressured by his family to try school teaching as a profession but gave it up after two brief stints at a government school in Chennapatna, lasting, in all, four days. Although family expectations were upset, his decision to become a full-time writer was respected.

The year 1930 witnessed the 'breakthrough' creative event in our writer's life. In September of that year, on the "auspicious" day of Vijayadasami selected by his grandmother, he opened a new exercise book and waited for inspiration to strike. After writing his first line, "It was Monday morning," he visualised a small railway station. Suddenly its name "seemed to hurl into view" and Malgudi was born. Quite literally, the Malgudi railway station put our writer and, in a sense, Indian fiction in English on "the right track of writing." Narayan always saw the birth of Malgudi as the pivotal moment of his writing life.

Of Narayan's 15 novels, all but the last, The Grandmother's Tale (1993), are set in Malgudi. Many, although not all, of his finest short stories take place in this fictional town. Malgudi, quite obviously, is South Indian, but it cannot be reduced to any one place. Malgudi is not Mysore (the writer's home of 70 years), nor Madras (where he was born, raised and returned to spend his final years), nor Coimbatore (which he visited frequently over the decades and treated as a second home while living in Mysore). It is an imagined little town into which many real places and experiences have made inputs. Here change happens slowly, but surprises abound at every step in the midst of ordinariness, which is, if you look beneath the surface, not ordinary.

Narayan has provided some interesting accounts of the birth of his fictional town and also its significance to his work. He observed, on one occasion, that he was a "treacherous writer" outside the bounds of Malgudi. That must not be taken literally. But critics and serious readers round the world recognise that Malgudi is absolutely central to Narayan's fiction. One of the surprises of Narayan's fictional milieu is how well the televised series, in which the Malgudi characters speak Hindi, has been received all over India. The story of how Narayan began his escape from Mysorean obscurity has a whiff of Coleridge-like magical poetry. The good fairy was Krishna ('Kittu') Raghavendra Purna, a young neighbour whose conviction that his friend would become a major writer of international stature was unshakeable. When he went to Exeter College, Oxford in the early Thirties, Purna made it his mission to get Narayan into print. His literary interests and leftist political leanings brought him into contact with Greene and the two became close. Late in 1934, he showed Greene a dozen of Narayan's short stories. The British writer was positive (finding most of them "excellent", as he told Purna in a December 1934 letter), but non-sanguine about their prospects of publication in Britain.

Undaunted, Purna in 1935 pressed Greene, who had moved to London after a three-month African journey, to read the much-travelled typescript of Narayan's first novel, which the author had, somewhat quaintly, titled "Swaminathan the Tate." The novel had been making the rounds of London publishers and the last of them, Dent, had been requested, in the event of rejection to send the typescript to Purna at Exeter College, Oxford. Narayan had actually instructed his friend to "weight the manuscript with a stone and drown it in the Thames." As a last resort, Purna took Swami to Greene. The rest is literary history.

Thanks to Greene's intervention, the first three novels, Swami and Friends (1935), The Bachelor of Arts (1937), and The Dark Room (1938), found British publishers, Hamish Hamilton, Nelson and MacMillan, although, as Narayan notes in his autobiography, none of them would venture to publish him twice. Greene also found his friend a literary agent, David Higham of Pearn, Pollinger and Higham. The reviews were enthusiastic, but the sales poor

Narayan now had a family to support. Departing from convention he had found his own bride, Rajam, and married her in 1934 in the face of a grave astrological hurdle ("Mars in

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the Seventh House," a theme which figures recurrently in Narayan's fiction). In 1936 a daughter, Hema, was born. The struggling writer found it difficult to make ends meet, although the joint family continued to provide a safety net.

The death of his wife from typhoid in 1939 dealt him the most shattering blow of his life. He was plunged into a period of darkness from which he took several years to emerge. His effort to come out of it and his eventual return to a normal life and to creative literary pursuits was as arduous, courageous and moving a struggle as any encountered in literary history. The quality of this whole experience, set out in his fourth novel, The English Teacher (1945), helped him come to terms with his loss and to fashion a personal philosophy which would suffuse all his subsequent work. Unusually for his times, he rejected the idea of re-marriage and brought up his daughter himself, supported by his joint family. Infidelities are well known in the literary world. In Narayan's case, he would remain faithful to Rajam all his life. There can be no doubt that the extraordinary experience of 1939-1945 had a profound influence on Narayan the writer. Greene noted, in his 1978 introduction to The Bachelor of Arts, that "something had permanently changed in Narayan" and that "the writer's personal tragedy has been our gain." Sadness and humour in later Narayan would go "hand in hand like twins, inseparable."

From the 1950s, Narayan's star rose steadily. He already had five published novels. The decade saw the appearance of three novels, The Financial Expert (1952), Waiting for the Mahatma (1955), and The Guide (1958), and a new collection of short stories. He now had a following in the United States, helped by the publication of some of his work by Michigan University Press. In 1956, for the first time in his life, he travelled beyond South India. En route to the United States on a Rockefeller Foundation grant, he stopped off in London and had his first sight of Greene, his friend of two decades. The outline of The Guide was in his mind and he consulted Greene on the denouement, more specifically whether the

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hero should live or die. Greene was unequivocal and Narayan thus had on his hands "the life of a man condemned to death before he was born and grown" (My Days).

By the second half of the 1950s, Narayan had gained an Indian and worldwide public. For the first time in his life, his economic circumstances were comfortable and even prosperous. But he chose to maintain a simple lifestyle in Mysore. The sole indulgence was a blue Mercedes he imported, with special government sanction, in the 1960s. He who, until his 50th year, did not venture out of South India became an inveterate traveller. The 1960s saw the publication of two novels, The Man-Eater of Malgudi (1962) and The Vendor of Sweets (1967). In 1964 appeared Gods, Demons and Others, Narayan's retelling with his characteristic delicacy and irony of India legends. Amused by the title, Forster queried: "Who is left out?" Narayan followed this up in the next decade with his own rendering of The Ramayana (1972) and The Mahabharata (1978). These would prove perennially popular. His autobiography, My Days, was published in the United States in 1974 to critical acclaim.

Two years later came another novel, The Painter of Signs (1976), in which official India's obsession, family planning, came in for gentle fun and the predicaments of a liberated woman were explored. Narayan's twelfth novel, A Tiger for Malgudi (1983), retained the small town setting but took the experimental step of making the narrator-protagonist a captured tiger, which by the end of the novel has been through it all. This anthropomorphic tale was the culmination of the writer's longstanding interest in animal behaviour and psychology.

The 1980s also saw the appearance of two fine short story collections, Malgudi Days (1982) and Under the Banyan Tree and Other Stories (1985). Their offerings, taken from different periods of the writer's career, include such classics as "An Astrologer's Day," "Gateman's Gift," "Fellow Feeling," "A Horse and Two Goats," "A Breath of Lucifer," and "Annamalai."

Greene's disappointment that the tale "Under the Banyan Tree," which he described as "the story of all us storytellers," had been left out of Malgudi Days prompted Narayan to make it the title story of the 1985 collection.

The ninth decade of the writer's life saw his creativity undiminished. The period saw the publication of three novels, each first serialised in Frontline - Talkative Man (1986), The World of Nagaraj (1990), and The Grandmother's Tale (1993). The last, a delicately crafted fictional recreation of some family folklore, is the only Narayan novel without a Malgudi setting. This decade also saw him regularly contribute sketches and essays which he titled "Table Talk."

Over the decades, a number of awards and honours came Narayan's way. In 1961, The Guide won the Sahitya Akademi Award, the first work of fiction in English to do so. In 1980, the writer received the Arthur Christopher Benson Award from the Royal Society of Literature and in 1987, the Soviet Land Nehru Award. In 1981, he became an honorary member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Honorary doctorates were conferred by various universities. In 1964, Narayan was awarded the Padma Bhushan. In 2000, he received the Padma Vibhushan. In 1985, he was nominated to the Rajya Sabha for his distinguished contributions to the nation's cultural life. During his six-year term as MP, he made it a point, during his rare interventions in the parliamentary forum, to speak up for India's children. His observations on the overburdened school curriculum symbolised by the weighing down of children by their school bags provoked much discussion.

In the early 1990s, the writer suffered some bouts of illness and, chiefly for medical reasons, left Mysore for Madras where he set up home with his daughter, Hema, and her husband C.S. Chandrasekaran (Chandru). Her death from cancer in April 1994 was the second great blow in his life, but his hard-won philosophical understanding allowed him to come to terms with it with something like equanimity. "We are all in the queue. She has jumped the queue," he remarked to me soon after the news came from hospital. He then went on to discuss the side effects of chemotherapy under certain circumstances. "It's like setting fire to the house to roast the pig," he said, recalling the 'Chinese manuscript', or rather fable, in Charles Lamb's essay, "A Dissertation Upon Roast Pig."

Living in an apartment with his son-in-law, he continued to write, spend time with his granddaughter and great-grandchildren (and, when opportunity permitted, his U.S. based grandson), and enjoy the company of friends.

Approaching 90, Narayan worked intermittently on a novella, fragments of which have been published. He used to remark that as writers grew older, their novels got shorter. "It's like the Indian goldsmith at the end of the day," he told me once. "He sweeps in the dust carefully to retrieve the gold particles he thinks can be found in the dust."

Narayan's mind was extraordinarily clear till the last. Writing an introduction to a Narayan novel, Greene once speculated that "a writer in some ways knows his own future his end is his beginning." Imaginatively, Narayan in his nineties would return, now and then, to the characters and scene of his childhood, as though he were examining them as subject matter for new, shorter fiction. Just a few hours before he went on a ventilator, while he was experiencing fairly severe cardiac-respiratory problems and the duty doctor was cautioning against the strain of talking, Narayan told us who were at his bedside about a "short novel" he wished to begin straightaway.

He spoke of its plot at some length. It would be based on the life of his Tahsildar grandfather, who had managed to accumulate property way beyond his legitimate means and lost it all. "Part biography, part fiction," these words keep ringing in my ear. We discussed the book's length, I enquired, "about 35,000 words?" and the writer agreed: "that will be appropriate." He wanted us to bring him a diary in which he would start writing his 16th novel. He was in the habit of writing his fiction and essays in old diaries when he did not use elegantly bound notebooks. "Will it be a 2000 diary or a 2001 diary?" were the last words I heard from him. The criticism is occasionally heard, from literary scholars and others, that Narayan's Malgudi is a literary cocoon, where real-life conflicts, turbulence and socio-economic misery are not encountered. Naipaul, for one, seems to have given some credence to this complaint. But when Narayan is in flow, such criticism seems misdirected, almost banal. Who is to say with what theme or problem or slice of life or imaginative experience a novelist must deal?

Since the 1930s, when Narayan in the company of Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao cleared the path for modern Indian fiction in English, there has been a remarkable flowering of literary talent of Indian origin in English. Successful and, in some cases, world-renowned writers of Indian origin have dealt with imaginative themes in diverse ways in varied voices and different styles. You can take your pick of world-view, approach, theme, narrative technique, style, voice, it is a free literary world. In the midst of all this, Narayan's work stands tall unpretentious yet original, understated yet path-breaking, 'non-deliberate' and accessible yet philosophical and profound.

4

Novels of R. K. Narayan: A Thematic Study

R. K. Narayan (1906-2001), a product of British India, belongs to the earliest generations of Indian Writing in English. Hailing from an academic family, boasting also of the cartoonist R.K. Laxman, he started writing at a very young age. Narayan was a struggling artist and his renown as an author came gradually, in a long career sprinkled generously with rejections. His first novel, Swami and Friends (1935), which is the story of an eight year old school-going boy in the British-reigned South India, is today an enjoyable book read both by children and adults. The creator of the fictional South Indian town of Malgudi, Narayan's oeuvre includes travelogues, memoirs, essays, and retold legends like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Although Narayan's Malgudi, his characters and situations are fictional, they are very plausible, and contemporaneous of his time and location. Narayan employs everyday characters on whom the story lives. The narrative, though not descriptive of the scenes that it works in, is capable of painting in the mind's eye, the picture of a quaint town with the river bank and the dusty streets.

The Bachelor of Arts

The Bachelor of Arts (1937), set in Malgudi, is the second from Narayan's literary basket. It is a story about a young man, Chandran, tracing his college days, a failed love, a flight, a stint of asceticism, a revival and return, employment, and finally his marriage.

This work is just another example of the author's distinctive, subtle humour and his ability to draw his readers into the story, and hold them there from the beginning to the end. The story, though in third person narrative, is related through the perspective of the protagonist. The text follows Chandran as he gradually transforms from an impulsive adolescent to a mature adult, the trajectory of any young man's life.

"Chandran was just climbing the steps of the College Union when, Natesan, the secretary, sprang on him and said..." The story begins with Chandran being asked by Natesan, to fulfill his promise by speaking in the motion of 'Historians should be slaughtered first' in a college debate. Beginning from here Narayan goes on to trace the next few months, the last of Chandran's final year in college, stopping only with his marriage. In his trademark way of writing, the author steps clear from giving the background details of the character or the story and challenges the reader to judge by the present, running story. The Bachelor of Arts (1937) is a novel written by R. K. Narayan. It is the second book of a trilogy that began with Swami and Friends and ended with The English Teacher. It is again set in Malgudi, the fictional town Narayan invented for his novels.

Plot Summary

Narayan beautifully shows the transition of an adolescent mind into adulthood. The story revolves around a young guy named Chandran, who resembles a typical Indian upper middle class youth of the pre-independence era. First, the college life of the main character Chandran in late colonial times is described. After graduation, he falls in love with a girl, but will be rejected by the bride's parents, since his horoscope describes him as a manglik, a condition in which a manglik can only marry another manglik and if not, the non-manglik will die. Frustrated and desperate, he embarks on a journey as Sanyasi. On his journey he meets many people and he is also misunderstood as a great sage by some villagers. Due to the compunctions and the realisations, he decides to return home. He takes up a job as a newsagent and decides to marry, in order to please his parents, thinking of the discomfort he had caused them earlier.

Swami and Friends

Swami and Friends is the first of a trilogy of novels written by R. K. Narayan, a celebrated English language novelist from India. The novel, which is also Narayan's first, is set in pre-independence days in India, in a fictional town called Malgudi. The second book is The Bachelor of Arts and the third is The English Teacher.

Swami and Friends is the simple and charming story set in the 1930s of ten-year old Swaminathan and his experience of growing up in Malgudi, a town created by R.K. Narayan. Swami lives in a world of "bossy adults" parents and teachers, as well as his friends in school. Pleasing his demanding peers as well as the adults is a tough job indeed. But Swami tries to manage it to the best of his ability. Swami is impulsive, mischievous and innocent. And he has a very warm heart. Through his eyes we get to see a complete picture of South India during the pre-Independent era. We get to know how simple folk lived in the colonial days and about the uprisings, the rebellions and the strange mixture of resentment and reverence which ordinary people felt for the British.

Swami is a student of the Albert Mission School established by the British. So the main focus of the school is on "English education" and Christianity. Swami has four friends – Somu, the monitor who carries himself with an easy air; Mani, the good-for nothing; Sankar, the most brilliant boy in the class and Samuel, known as the "Pea". All four share a common trait – their ability to laugh at everything! Swami's relationship with each is one is different but they share a genuine common friendship. Swami's happy-go-lucky life changes drastically with the arrival of Rajam, a symbol of colonial power. This is how Narayan describes him: "He (Rajam) was a newcomer; he dressed very well, he was the only boy in class who wore socks and shoes, fur cap and tie, and a wonderful coat and knickers. He spoke very good English, exactly like a European; which meant that few in the school could make out what he said."

But despite the difference Swami and Rajam become friends. Unlike Swami, Rajam wants to impress everyone and become a leader. He is neither affectionate nor particularly loyal to his friends. But he never loses his cool and has the proverbial 'stiff upper lip'. But Swami is really impressed by him and is both loving and loyal to him although this causes misunderstanding with his other friends. Rajam is crazy about cricket and forms a cricket club. Swami comes for cricket practice to please Rajam even if it means missing his drill class and he gets into trouble for playing truant.

Swami runs away from home in a moment of desperation and gets lost on the way, thereby missing the cricket match for which he had been practicing all these days. Rajam is very angry and refuses to see Swami. Shortly afterwards Rajam's father is transferred. Swami gets to hear that Rajam would be leaving the very next day. Swami is shattered by the knowledge. The parting of the erstwhile friends is the most poignant scene in the book: "At the sight of the familiar face Swaminathan lost control of himself and cried: 'Oh Rajam, Rajam you are going away. When will you come back? Rajam kept looking at him without a word and then (as it seems to Swaminathan) opened his mouth to say something, when everything was disturbed by the guard's blast and the hoarse whistle of the engine.......Rajam's face with the words still unuttered on his lips, receded."

A Town Called Malgudi

A railway station serves as the main entry point for the town called malgudi. Its here you could find Raju, a guide who helps you to explore this hamlet. On the way through

Lawley's extension, you'll find Ananda Bhavan where you can have a sip of coffee and continue your journey. During your journey to malgudi (which in fact even God doesn't have the capability to create such an exquisite village), you'll come across the talkative man (who keeps gossiping about anything and everything), the financial expert (who earns money by providing loan and financial advice to villagers), Mr. Sampath (the owner of truth press), the English teacher and list goes endless. And as you explore further, you can come across this small creature called Swami.

The Real Crux

The story begins with Swami, who was born and brought up in Malgudi, attending his monotonous schooling in Albert Mission School. The way in which author portrays his tiresome school life of Swami flashes our childhood days. Now we could sense some of the nostalgic days when our parents used to force us to go to school, and how we tricked them by giving delusive reasons. It's here that R. K. Narayan had proved that he is not just a writer but an Almighty. Only few writers can bring the fiction to reality and R. K. Narayan is definitely the one.

The story gets its heat when Rajam, son of a police officer joins his school and the dispute that occurs between Rajam and Mani (another gigantic character, who is also Swami's friend) and thereinafter the steady friendship between Swami, Rajam and Mani. The story continues further depicting silly incidents that usually occur between friends. Once you're through with this phase you might for sure need a bookmark, not to take a break but to search for your primary school address books and diaries. The only aim of this profound creature is to form a cricket team. There is one particular paragraph that shows genuine magic of Narayan's pen. It is reproduced below as follows:

Swami needs some cricket bat, ball and other accessories for forming a cricket team. So he makes a list of accessories and posts it to a cricket shop in Madras. He gets a reply from the shop asking him for a demand draft. Not knowing what demand draft means (well, even we didn't know what DD meant when we were kids) Swami replies to that letter stating that the letter seemed to have come to him by mistake and that he would like to be sent the cricket kit as soon as possible. Well, the contents must be clear to you even thought it's not hilarious. Not everyone can narrate like Narayan. If you really want to enjoy this incident, you should read Swami and Friends.

What started as an ambition, parted his friendship with Rajam. The writer nearly brings tears to your eyes when you see that Rajam moves out of the city without even saying a word to Swami. When you've reached the last page of the novel, you'll start realising that you made a fortune by reading and your search for R.K.Narayan's work starts here.

Plot Introduction

Swami and Friends is the story of ten-year old Swaminathan, a boy full of innocence, wonder, and mischief, and his experiences growing up in the fictional town of Malgudi. He is a student at the British-established Albert Mission School, which stresses Christianity, English literature, and the value of education. Life changes dramatically for young Swami when Rajam, a symbol of colonial power, joins the school, and becomes his close friend.

Plot Summary

A railway station serves as the main entry point for Malgudi. It is here that you find Raju, the guide who will help you explore the village. On your way through Lawley's extension, you'll visit Ananda Bhavan, where you can have a sip of coffee before continuing the journey. Some of the remarkable characters you'll meet during your visit are the town gossip, the financial expert, the man who owns Truth Press, the English teacher, and many others.

The story begins with Swami, who was born and brought up in Malgudi, attending his monotonous schooling in Albert Mission School. Rajam, son of a police officer joins his school and the dispute that occurs between Rajam and Mani (who is also Swami's friend.) and thereinafter the steady friendship between Swami, Rajam and Mani.

The only aim of this profound creature is to form a cricket team. What started as an ambition, parted his friendship with Rajam. Rajam moves out of the town without even saying a word to Swami. Swami gifts Rajam his favourite book which is accepted by Rajam through his ambiguous wave.

The Dark Room

The Dark Room is a novel written by R.K.Narayan, the well known English-language novelist from India. Like most of his other works, this is a tale set in the fictitious town of Malgudi.

Plot Introduction

The central character of this novel is Savitri, a submissive housewife, who is married to Ramani, an employee of the Engladia Insurance Company. They have three children, Kamala, Sumati and Babu. Savitri is a typical housewife of the India of those times, very much dominated and neglected by her husband. There is a dark room in their house where Savitri retires whenever her husbands harshness seems unbearable to her.

R. K. Narayan's —The Dark Room: The Indian Women's Perspective

A woman has held a very strange place in Indian society. She has been revered for being 'sati' and at the same time she has been hated and loathed for being a widow or for not bringing dowry. Stories of women are in abundance in the ancient literary texts. However, with the progress of time the woman of Indian society changed and she started making herself noticed by fathoming all areas which were until now the arena of men. In literature too, the role of woman was given a certain distinction. In this league R. K. Narayan writes about characters like Savitri and Shanta Bai in The Dark Room and shows the various perspectives of the Indian woman.

The Dark Room is the story of Ramani, the Branch Manager of the Engladia Insurance Company, his wife Savitri and his mistress Shanta Bai, the probationary insurance assistant. The story revolves around these three characters. Ramani and Savitri have a happy married life with three children Babu, Kamala and Sumati. Life is moving on smoothly with the occasional agitations and angers. Savitri gets upset at times by Ramani's behaviour and sulks in the dark room, "a musty unlit store-room" next to the kitchen. But life is still pleasant and happy.

One day Shanta Bai joins Ramani's office and soon they develop a relationship. Savitri comes to know about the affair and tries to stop Ramani. He refuses, so Savitri leaves the house to end her life. However, this could not happen as she is saved by a low caste blacksmith Mari. He and his wife Ponni take care of Savitri but after a few days of hardship and loneliness she returns to her home and children.

Narayan's novels have many a female character but most of them are traditional Indian women who live a life within the confines of their home. The character of Savitri in the first half of The Dark Room is an apt example. Despite the rude nature of her husband, Savitri performs the duties of a mother and wife uncomplainingly. She takes the frequent harshness with indifference. She behaves or talks only after judging his mood. She is the quintessential mother, wife and homemaker. She is the humble, patient, loyal wife mentioned in the scriptures. Savitri is such a humble and down-to-earth person that after hearing about her husband's affair, she does not believe it. Later she feels Ramani is not to be blamed.

Perhaps, she is not beautiful anymore and hence Ramani got attracted to Shanta Bai. In her innocence she starts paying attention to her looks.

Once again she dresses up not only to look good but in the manner in which Ramani likes. Narayan comments on the status of Savitri in her home where he says that she was so impotent even after fifteen years of marriage. And, the progress of Savitri's character shows that she had the essence of feminism in her but it had been suppressed for all these years. The mental torture that she has been going through draws out her inner strength and that gives her the courage to talk back.

Besides Savitri, there is Shanta Bai, the educated, manipulative seductress who knows how to use a woman's charm to win the man. She is the cunning, clever type who makes every right move to trap her prey. When he visits her home for the first time, her style of talking is conspicuous of her intention of enticing him.

Another character, though a minor one but plays a major role in the turn of events in the novel, is Ponni, Savitri's saviour who is the dominating type.

The English Teacher

The English Teacher is a 1945 novel written by R. K. Narayan. This is the third and final part in the series, preceded by Swami and Friends (1935) and The Bachelor of Arts (1937). This novel, dedicated to Narayan's wife Rajam is not only autobiographical but also poignant in its intensity of feeling. The story is a series of experiences in the life of Krishna, an English teacher, and his quest towards achieving inner peace and self-development.

Plot

Krishna is an English lecturer at the Albert Mission College. For several years he has enjoyed a bachelor's life, but this changes when his wife, Susila, and their child, Leela, move in with him. Krishna's life expands to include the happy domesticity of living with his wife and child: nearly half the novel focuses on the mundane joy of his day-to-day experiences with his family. However, one day Susila contracts typhoid after visiting a dirty lavatory and dies from the illness. Krishna is destroyed by her loss but receives a letter from a stranger indicating that Susila has been in contact with him and wishes to communicate with Krishna.

As an English teacher at Albert Mission College, Krishna has led a mundane and monotonous lifestyle comparable to that of a cow, but this took a turn when his wife, Susila, and their child, Leela, come to live with him. With their welfare on his hands, Krishna learns to be a proper husband and learns how to accept the responsibility of taking care of his family. He felt that his life had comparatively improved, as he understood that there's more meaning to life than to just teaching in the college.

However, on the day when they went in search of a new house, Susila contracts typhoid after visiting a dirty lavatory, keeping her in bed for weeks. Throughout the entire course of her illness, Krishna constantly tries to keep an optimistic view about Susila's illness, keeping his hopes up by thinking that her illness would soon be cured. However, Susila eventually succumbs and passes away. Krishna, destroyed by his loss, had suicidal thoughts but gave them up for the sake of his daughter, Leela.

He led his life as a lost and miserable person after her death, but after he received a letter from a stranger who indicated that Susila has been in contact with him and that she wanted to communicate with Krishna, he became more collected and cheerful.

This leads to Krishna's journey in search of enlightenment, with the stranger acting as a medium to Susila in the spiritual world. Leela, on the other hand, goes to a preschool where Krishna gets to meet the Headmaster, a profound man who cared for the students in his school and teaches them moral values through his own methods. The Headmaster puts his students as his top priority but he doesn't care for his own family and children, eventually leaving them on the day predicted by an astrologer as to be when he was going to die, which did not come true. Krishna gets to learn through the Headmaster on the journey to enlightenment; eventually learning to communicate to Susila on his own, thus concluding the entire story itself, with the quote that he felt 'a moment of rare immutable joy'.

Literary Significance and Criticism

The synopsis at the back of 'The English Teacher' by Indian Thought Publications say, "Never has the magical storyteller of imaginary Malgudi woven tragedy and humour so deftly together."

Krishna's Journey in the English Teacher

Krishna, the central character in The English Teacher, by R. K. Narayan (1906-2001) undertakes an emotional, intellectual, and spiritual journey during the course of the novel. At the start of the novel he is an English teacher, living and teaching at the same school where he was once a pupil, and at the end we see him resigning his post, beginning work at a nursery school, and learning to communicate psychically with his dead wife. He learns and changes during the course of the novel in a way which he could not have predicted at the beginning. The journey takes him from a lifestyle which he found unsatisfactory to finding a set of values and a way of life that he feels he can believe in wholly.

Krishna's change comes about not as a result of any grand plan or ambition, but as a result of his response to a series of challenging circumstances which arise once he begins to take steps away from the cloistered and protective environment of his school.

This day-by-day, unforeseen-event by unforeseen-event progress is reflected in Narayan's approach to the novel itself.

Narayan gives the impression that he has no pre-planned plot in mind when the story opens, but instead focuses on a meticulously detailed depiction of Krishna's experiences, keeping to the observable surface reality of his perceptions, thoughts, and feelings, without digression or analysis or interpretation. This rigorous unadorned focus on observable phenomena results in some stunningly beautiful writing.

But although Krishna's journey takes place as a result of a series of unpredictable events, a number of recurring themes are being worked out in the course of the novel. These themes might be said to be Krishna's progress from predictability to unpredictability, from the academic world to the real world of life and death, from adulthood to childhood, and from a western mentality to an eastern mentality.

From Predictability to Unpredictability

Krishna repeatedly finds himself being drawn out of situations which ought to have been predictable and ordered by events which are spontaneous and unpredictable, and it is clear that he finds spontaneity and unpredictability to be stimulating and life-enhancing, while predictability and order, although providing a cushion of comfort and security, is ultimately stifling and deadening.

Krishna is roused from his predictable and ordered life at his school, where he had come to feel he lived 'like a cow', and had a continuous 'sense of something missing', and where a pupil spelling 'honour' without the 'u' is seen as a catastrophe by his colleagues, by the unexpected news that his wife and child, both of whom are to be sources of spontaneity and unpredictability throughout the novel, are coming to join him, and that he will need to move out of his lodgings at the school and find a house for them. This marks the first step of what becomes a journey out of the cloistered world of the school and into the real world of ordinary people leading ordinary lives. Susila, his wife, brings unpredictability into his life at every turn. For example when they go to look at a house she wants to make a long diversion to walk by the river and bathe her feet, where the rational orderly Krishna would have naturally taken the most direct route, and it is clear that he finds her unpredictable behaviour a source of delight and inspiration.

Krishna does not adjust to this new influence without a struggle, however, as is seen in the episode where she gets rid of the predictably-unpredictable alarm clock he had kept on his desk for years. This clock, which was liable to set off its alarm at arbitrary times of day and night, seems to symbolise his old attitude to predictability versus spontaneity. He held onto the clock for years, as if its unpredictable behaviour were precious to him, and yet he stifled it with a literary tome whenever it sounded its alarm.

He seems to have cherished it for its unpredictability, even though that unpredictability was inappropriate and ineffective, without quite realising why, and when his wife gets rid of it behind his back it comes as a great shock to him and causes a row which drags on for several days before he can accept her act with equanimity.

This jarring episode seems to mark his transition from a world dominated by predictability to a world dominated by unpredictability, and from that point on he has to start actually living day to day on the basis of the truth which he may have previously intuitively sensed, but stifled, that there is a severe limit to what can be achieved in life through any system which is ordered, predictable, and knowable.

The turning point of the story arises from Susila's unpredictability. When they go to look at the house we could not possibly predict that she would go for a walk on her own, get stuck in a contaminated lavatory, and then become ill. When they prepare for the journey it might have seemed that Narayan was preparing for a plot in which something bad happened to their child while they were away, but in the event the important incident is not something that could have been guessed beforehand, either by the reader or by Krishna, but an unpredictable event which arises on the spur of the moment. Krishna's intention was that their visits to view houses should proceed in an ordered, predictable, rational way, but Susila brought unpredictability to the occasions, resulting in moments of beauty, such as the walk by the river, but also in the awful tragedy of her becoming infected by a fatal illness. She brings reality into his life, which was previously protected from reality by the enclosed ordered world of the school, and later she initiates the most unpredictable event of all, her psychic communication with him from beyond death.

The futility of clinging to the belief that life can be orderly, predictable, and knowable is shown in two central, and symmetrical, predictions which occupy a prominent place in the novel. The first is the doctor's assertion that typhoid, which Susila has contracted, 'is the one fever which goes strictly by its own rules. It follows a time-table . . . and that Susila will be well in a few weeks. But in spite of his further assurances that her attack is 'Absolutely normal course. No complications. A perfect typhoid run . . .' Susila dies.

The other prominent demonstration of the futility of believing that life can be knowable and predictable is seen in the headmaster's belief in a prediction made by an astrologer, 'who can see past present and future as one, and give everything its true value' that he will die on a given date. But although (just as the doctor had asserted that Susila's typhoid was 'A perfect typhoid run') the headmaster has found that his 'life has gone precisely as he predicted', the headmaster lives.

Both predictions are propounded with certainly, and both prove to be false. The scientifically-based prediction of life is thwarted by death, and the mystical prediction of death is thwarted by in life. Both of these episodes show the limitations of man's ability to know and predict the world. The truth is that we cannot know, and cannot predict, and any view of life, whether deriving from modern western science, or ancient eastern mysticism, which disregards the unknowable and sees only what is supposedly known, and supposedly predictable, is hopelessly inadequate.

From the Academic World to the Law of Life

While these episodes fail to provide Krishna with anything rational to believe in, they do bring him face to face with the reality of life and death, and confronting the realities of life without retreating into the safe cerebral world of literature and philosophy is an important component of his journey. His unsatisfying immersion in a sterile literary approach to life is shown in a number of ways. For example the novel opens with him wearily facing the fact that he is reading 'for the fiftieth time, Milton, Carlyle and Shakespeare'. Later he tries to write a love poem for his wife, but it is simply a copy of a poem by Wordsworth and later still he tries to read a book on Plato, but gives up on the very first sentence.

Now he is discovering how ordinary people encounter the big issues of life and death, not as seen through the perspective of literature or philosophy and not in a way that would imply that some profound universal conclusions could be drawn, but as they actually experience it in everyday life.

And Narayan himself, insofar as we can identify him with the character of Krishna, is writing at the level of those ordinary people. He does not adopt the position of a novelist presenting the reader with fictitious characters which he has created, and which are under his control, as for example Charles Dickens does, but in the guise of Krishna he places himself firmly among the ordinary people, and breaks down the boundaries between real life outside his novel and the life within the novel. Just as Krishna faces life without illusions, so Narayan seems to create his novel without the usual illusions of the novelist, such as pre-planned plot and fictitious characters.

In an outburst with one of his students Krishna says of literature: 'Don't worry so much about these things they are trash, we are obliged to go through and pretend we like them, but all the time the problem of living and dying is crushing us.'

In coming to terms with the death of his wife literature, philosophy, and rationalism, are no use to him. They are all illusions, and the journey he is on involves leaving illusions behind. Living without illusions seemed to be the greatest task for me in life now . . . humanity, nurtured in illusions from beginning to end! The twists and turns of fate would cease to shock us if we knew, and expected nothing more than, the barest truths and facts of life.

Narayan's writing style, which is inseparable from the observations of Krishna, the first-person narrator, has been showing us this all along. Right from page one Narayan has presented us with only 'the barest truths and facts of life'.

The truth Krishna wants to discover cannot be found in Shakespeare, Carlyle, or Plato, it is found only among real people leading real lives, it is 'the law of life'.

The law of life can't be avoided. The law comes into operation the moment we detach ourselves from our mother's womb. All struggle and misery in life is due to our attempt to arrest this law or get away from it . . .

From Adulthood to Childhood

Children are very much in evidence throughout 'The English Teacher', and are important guides for Krishna on his journey. At the beginning he is with the boys at his school, but they are no longer children but young adults, already entangled in the system from which he needs to escape. The children who help to show him the way are the younger children, his own daughter, Leela, and the children at the nursery school she attends. The young children are important because they are spontaneous and natural. They have not yet had their natural energy stifled and diverted by the deadening educational system, and are free from rationalism, religion, and other systems of thought. The most prominent character in the novel, after Krishna and his family, is the headmaster of Leela's school. He is a champion of childhood, having devoted his life to children since receiving the prediction that he would die, and believes they are 'angels', 'the real gods on earth', and employs what he calls 'The Leave Alone System' in his school.

The Leave Alone System, which will make them wholesome human beings, and also help us, those who work along with them, to work off the curse of adulthood.

Krishna befriends the headmaster, and although at one point he fears that the headmaster is 'a man mentally unsound' he is drawn towards the headmaster's views, which are reinforced by his wife's psychic communication that children are more in tune with the psychic side of life than adults, and at the climax of the novel he decides to work with the headmaster in his nursery school.

In the second half of the novel Krishna's discovery of children as an effective countermeasure against 'the curse of adulthood', and the opening of his mind that he is experiencing through meditation, pave the way for his resignation from his old job and the adoption of a more genuine lifestyle.

We might also see in the headmaster's comment: 'Children have taught me to speak plainly, without the varnish of the adult world.' A clue as to the inspiration behind Narayan's direct, factual, unadorned style of writing.

From West to East

Another component of Krishna's journey is that he encounters the coexistence of western and native cultural attitudes, which also represent the attitudes of Indians of a newer and older generation. For example when Susila is ill she is treated both by a doctor who practises western scientific medicine, and by a Swamiji who uses mystical methods of healing. The Swamiji is summoned by Susila's mother, representing an older generation than Krishna himself, who believes the 'Evil Eye' has fallen on her daughter, and it is notable that Krishna feels 'ashamed' that the doctor finds the

Swamiji in the house, showing that he is alienated from, and embarrassed by, the native culture of the older generation of his own country.

In the event, both the scientific and the mystical attempts at healing fail, and Susila dies. Narayan presents us with the coexistence of these two systems of thought in Indian culture, but does not make an issue of being 'for' one and 'against' another because in the matters of life and death that he wants to focus on here the distinction between western and eastern thought pales into insignificance.

Other instances of the juxtaposition of English and native cultures arise in the novel. For example it may be significant that the street where the headmaster lives, with its poor sanitation, and where 'unkempt and wild-looking children rolled about in the dust' is named Anderson Street, and Anderson may have been 'some gentleman of the East India Company's days!'. But while this observation is potent, it is the observations he wishes to make on the educational system towards the end of the novel which represent the main focus of his attack.

The final stage of Krishna's journey takes him further from the from the western intellectual frame of mind, inherited from the British, in which he was embedded at the opening of the novel, and further towards native Indian spiritual practices. To reach his goal of 'a harmonious existence' he takes up his deceased wife's psychically-communicated challenge, which he receives initially through a medium, to develop his mind sufficiently to communicate with her psychically himself, and bridge the gap between life and life-after-death. Although initially he had been bemused by his wife's devotional practices, mocking her with 'Oh! Becoming a yogi!' he now relies on her to guide him, from beyond the grave, in his 'self-development'.

This self-development consists of Zen-like meditation in which, for a certain amount of time each day, he empties his mind. His main motive for undertaking this development is to reach closer psychic communication with his wife, but he also experiences a general improvement in his state of mind as a result.

> It was a perpetual excitement, ever promising some new riches in the realm of experience and understanding . . . There was a real cheerfulness growing within me, memory hurt less . . .

Compare this to the boredom and spiritual deadness he had come to find in western literature and philosophy and we see how he has found something truly enriching in his native culture. The simple message of 'belief' which his wife offers as the key to his progress also shows how inadequate the western approach, with its 'classifying, labelling, departmentalising' was for his real needs: 'Belief, belief.' Above reason, scepticism, and even immediate failures, I clung to it.

In the final chapter the issues of the novel come to a head with Krishna's resignation from his post as English teacher and his psychic reunion with his wife. In his attack on the system he is rebelling against he criticises not English Literature itself 'for who could be insensible to Shakespeare's sonnets, or Ode to the West Wind' but India's adherence to an educational system which stifles the spirit of its students and alienates them from their native culture:

> This education has reduced us to a nation of morons; we were strangers to our own culture and camp followers of another culture, feeding on leavings and garbage . . . What about our own roots? . . . I am up against the system, the whole method and approach of a system of education which makes us morons, cultural morons, but efficient clerks for all your business and administration offices.

Having thrown off this cultural inheritance from the west, and decided to 'withdraw from the adult world and adult work into the world of children' he is free to take a further step in his traditional Indian self-development and reach a state in which 'one's mind became clean and bare and a mere chamber of fragrance'. He finally learns to experience at the psychic level, and when his wife appears before him he reaches 'a moment of rare, immutable joy a moment for which one feels grateful to Life and Death.'

In conclusion we might say that the quote 'What about our own roots?' which I chose as the title for this essay could apply to Krishna's journey on a number of levels. It could apply to all of us as adults, alienated from our roots in childhood; to modern Indians, alienated from their native cultural roots; and to humanity as a whole, in that we have become rational human beings, alienated from our roots in the unknown.

The Critical Aspects

At the beginning of The English Teacher we find Krishna to be a sensitive and sincere teacher who is completely wrapped in his work of teaching Carlyle and Milton to the students of Albert Mission College at Malgudi. In the first half of the story Krishna is portrayed as an affectionate and protective father to Leela as well as a doting husband to Susila. But after his wife's death he is forced to face the harsh realities of life and is tortured by feelings of loneliness. He leads a mechanical existence, attending college and looking after his daughter, to whom he is both a mother and father. Krishna was on the verge of committing suicide after his wife's death, but he resisted the temptation because he felt it was his responsibility to bring up his daughter.

Krishna receives a message from an old man that his dead wife is trying to communicate with him through the old man. During their psychic meetings, with the old man acting as a medium, Susila's spirit infuses into the almost-suicidal Krishna the strength and courage to face the harsh realities of life.

Susila's spirit expresses her inability to communicate with Krishna as he is not in the right state of mind to receive her messages. First of all Krishna should rid his mind of all trace of sorrow about her untimely death. In course of time Krishna attains a state of mental readiness to receive her messages without the intervention of the medium.

Krishna develops friendship with a headmaster who runs a kindergarten school. He admits his daughter in the same school. The eccentric headmaster is a refreshing contrast to Krishna. The headmaster doesn't believe in spoon-feeding or excessive discipline and allows the children to play games most of the time, teaching them lessons in between their play. This mode of learning seems to be effective.

The headmaster is a hen-pecked husband. He does not go home for lunch, knowing that his wife will be waiting for him, and chooses to have his meal with Krishna instead. When he goes home the first question he asks his children is, "is your mother at home?" When they reply, "No" he says, "Excellent" with great relief. His termagant wife does not allow their children to study in his school and brings them up in a wild and barbaric manner.

The headmaster tells Krishna that according to an astrologer's prediction, he will die in a few days' time. His feelings about his own death may perhaps be a psychic phenomenon, or a suicidal wish to escape from his worries and miseries. When the death for which he waits so calmly does not come, he cuts off all his connections with his family and treats himself as dead and his life as a new birth. The irony lies in the fact that although he proves to be a good teacher and a good headmaster to his students, he is a failure in the role of a father to his own children, for he fails miserably in bringing them up.

The headmaster exerts a distinct influence in transforming Krishna's life. Krishna resigns his job at college as he finds it meaningless, and joins the headmaster's school as a teacher. He finally attains peace of mind and realises that life will have meaning for him from then onwards. He gradually overcomes his grief over the loss of his wife and finds happiness and fulfilment in bringing up his young daughter. He no longer requires the presence of Susila's spirit to infuse confidence in him to face life, though Susila's spirit remains with him Forever.

Comments On The English Teacher By Some Indian Literary Critics

According to Harish Raizada The English Teacher, as an autobiographical novel, completes a trilogy along with his other two novels 'Swami and Friends' and 'The Bachelor of Arts'. It depicts man as bearing 'the sweet and bitter fruits of life.

K. R. Srinivasa lyengar says that the description of Krishna's married life the first few years of happiness, the excruciating agony during the weeks of Susila's illness, the 'last journey' to the cremation ground is one of the most moving and flawless pieces of writing in modern English fiction. Not a word is wasted and not a word rings false. The second half of the novel, however, takes us to unfamiliar regions. Krishna's numbed misery and his wish to be both a mother and a father to Leela are understandable enough, but the experiments in psychic communication with Susila with the help of a medium introduce a whimsical or fantastic element into a story which, up to that point, had been transparently true to life. The eccentric headmaster of the 'pyol' school and his termagant wife and their wild children make for further seemingly incongruous elements.

Automatic writing and attempts at psychic contact with the dead are not altogether uncommon: and the soil of India doubtless breeds every type of idealist and eccentric, waif and vagabond. Nevertheless it is difficult to feel that the first and second halves of 'The English Teacher' blend naturally and make an artistic whole. The theme of the novel is obviously the 'death' of Susila in the first half, and her 'resurrection' in the second half. Paradise Lost being followed by paradise Regained. Krishna loses Susila in the flesh, but on the last page of the novel she comes back to him, to be with him forever.

> 'Susila! Susila!' I cried. 'You here!' 'Yes, I'm here, have always been here.'

Is Krishna dreaming? Is it anything more than the physical projection of Krishna's psychic ecstasy? Isn't this a resurrection greater than life? 'The boundaries of our personalities suddenly dissolved' Krishna concludes his autobiographical narrative. 'It was a moment of rare, immutable joy, a moment for which one feels grateful to life and death'.

According to Professor P. S. Sundaram, The English Teacher is a novel with a difference, not only in the type of love between Krishna and Susila that is depicted, but also in the author's bold excursion into the realms of the dead. But then one is inclined to accept K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar's view when he asks 'Is Krishna dreaming? Is it any more than an apocalyptic vision of Krishna's psychic ecstasy? Isn't this a resurrection greater than life!'

The English Teacher written in 1945 is the last of the trilogy preceded by Swami and Friends and Bachelor of Arts. The hero is the schoolboy in the first novel, is a college student in the second, and is a lecturer in the third. This novel is not only autobiographical but also poignant in its intensity of feeling. It was occasioned by the death of Narayan's wife Rajam in the year 1939.

Plot of the Novel

Krishna is an English lecturer at the Albert Mission College. For several years he has enjoyed a bachelor's life, but this changes when his wife, Susila, and their child, Lila, move in with him. Krishna's life expands to include the happy domesticity of living with his wife and child: nearly half the novel focuses on the mundane joy of his day-to-day experiences with his family.

However, one day Susila contracts typhoid after visiting a dirty lavatory and dies from the illness. Krishna is destroyed by her loss but receives a letter from a stranger indicating that

Susila has been in contact with him and wishes to communicate with Krishna. This leads to Krishna's journey in search of enlightenment, with the stranger acting as a medium to Susila in the spiritual world.

The Sub-plot

The sub-plot in the novel is the story of the headmaster who attempts to change the educational system through his Leave Alone system of education. The headmaster exerts a distinct influence in transforming Krishna's life. It is only on his pressure that Krishnan takes stock of his career and realises that he has to do something meaningful in life. He resigns from his job as a lecturer and joins the head master in the running of his school. It is only then that he realises that life will have meaning for him.

From Within

From a man dependent on his wife and daughter for happiness, and later the medium, Krishna becomes self-reliant and realises that happiness, or in his case, peace of mind and equanimity comes from within. His peace of mind comes to him at a time when he least expects it, i.e. when he gives up everything, cleansed himself of all worldly possessions, his wife, his daughter, a good income in the form of a respected job and salary.

Setting

The setting of the place Malgudi was not new to me having read his Swami and Friends. Malayan's Malgudi is a great literary creation and is a microcosm of a small Indian town, which does not shed its basic character even with the influence of the west. In the novel Narayan does not venture much out of Malgudi like he did in The Guide or in the Bachelor of Arts.

In my first reading I noticed with interest the description of the river, and its banks. Another description of the landscape which struck me was the description of the house of Krishnan's friend. The small wood, the lotus pond and the alcove in a corner are described so beautifully that they seem to dance before our eyes. Later I discovered that Narayan has given apt settings to the happenings in the novel. The setting of each scene acts as a catalyst in the presentation of the scene. For example, the filthy surroundings of the head master's house give us an indication of the harmony that might be expected in the house.

Plot

The inclusion of the super natural in the novel surprised me. I was interested only in the first half of the novel in the beginning. The antics of the child Lila were the only things which interested me in the second half of the novel. I felt that the second half of the novel was not in resonance with the first part of the novel. I was disappointed because of the death of Susila. And I couldn't understand why Narayan was making a fuss about a person's death and the efforts put by those living to lead a normal life.

Order-Disorder-Order

I have observed that most of Narayan's novels follow the pattern , Order-Disorder-Order and this novel is no exception. The married life of Krishnan establishes the order in the novel. The visit to the infected lavatory and subsequent illness of Susila mark the disorder. Order is once again restored in the novel with the union of Krishnan and Susila. Later, having gathered an idea about the life of Narayan it came as no surprise to me that he had included the supernatural in the novel. Having witnessed the death of a near one, I could later connect with Krishnan's efforts to cope with the loss.

Characters

The protagonist of this novel is Krishnan, a lecturer at the Albert Mission College. As the novel progresses, we find that the frivolous youngster has been replaced by a person who is thoughtful, and selfless. We see Krishnan in the ancient ashrams in Hindu Dharma, namely, Bramhacharya, Grihasta and Sanyasi.

Though he has evolved into an admirable individual, he himself does not realise this and does not acknowledge the compliments paid to him on his farewell day. He is basically a student of literature and he always has literature at the back of his head. He keeps quoting poets and writers. Krishna is not ignorant of the aesthetic value of English literature and is not opposed to teaching it as a matter of pride or principle. He shows great care and diligence in nursing his wife. Even after his wife's death he makes heroic efforts to get on normally with life, even though he finds no purpose in living. He is a good father to Lila and strives to make her forget her mother.

Susila, Krishnan's wife, is a character which interested me a lot. She is the perfect epitome of how a wife should be. Though she was petted and cared for at home she shouldered responsibility and excelled in housework. Her quick wit and sense of humour make her a lovely companion. Added to that is her constant urge to learn new things.

Though she has stopped formal education, she reads at home whenever she can make time. Even after she passes away, she is interested in the welfare of her husband and child and watches them constantly. She brings a streak of unpredictability in Krishnan's monotonous life starting with the disposal of the alarm clock to her demise.

The headmaster is a very important character in the novel. He is the person who makes Krishnan realise that money is not important as long as we do something whic brings us emotional fulfillment. (Frankly in the first reading of the novel what interested me in the headmaster was the fact that he did not use a towel!!) What struck me as soon as I read about the headmaster was Socrates quote about wives making philosophers of men. The headmaster's leave alone system of education was an innovation which he hoped would help people fight off the curse of adulthood. Lila, the daughter of Krishnan is another important character in the novel. She arrives at her father's place at the age of seven months thereby transforming his life. He learns how to be selfless because of Lila. She learns to live without her mother in a very short span of time and showers all her love on her father. Her antics interested me in the first reading of the novel. In the subsequent reading of the novel, I understood how Narayan brilliantly created the character of the child. He brings to our notice the short attention spans and the tantrums thrown by children using Lila's character.

Themes

The main theme of the novel is life and death. The problems that one encounters in coping with the death of a dear one are depicted in the novel. Both Krishnan and Lila lose an important member in their family. While Lila continues her normal routine, the life of Krishnan is thrown out of gear. It takes a lot of effort on his part and the guidance of his late wife for him to come to terms with his wife's death.

Another important theme of the novel is the system of education in India. The lack of a proper system of education had made a generation of morons according to Krishnan. That is why he decides to resign and join the headmaster in starting a new system of education where the development of the individual would be given importance.

Conflict between the west and the east is also evident in the novel. For example, when Susila is ill, even though Krishnan brings a doctor, his in laws invite a Swami to treat their daughter. In coming to terms with the death of his wife, literature, philosophy and rationalism are no use to him and it is only the Indian concept of Zen like meditation which brings him closer to his wife, as conceived by R. K. Narayan.

Though mentioned in passing, Narayan also makes a mention of the bad working of the municipalities in the small towns in India. He describes in detail the unkempt surroundings of the Anderson Street and says that since the municipalities were busy with internal fights they had no time to waste for such developmental activities.

Another recurring theme in the novels in the pre-independence era was the effect of the colonial rule in India. In The English Teacher also, the presence of the crown and its agents is there, though not as much as in other novels. In the scathing remarks Krishnan makes on the Principal Mr. Brown and on the education system, we come to know about the bitterness that people had toward the British.

A Chronicle of Human Relationship

The book is an excellent chronicle of human relationships. The sweet and harmonious domestic life of Krishnan and Susila is contrasted with the discordant relationship of the headmaster and his wife. The cordial relation between colleagues, between supervisor and subordinate, the social sensitivities and the decorum to be followed, for example, by the mother-in-law and son-in-law are depicted in a touching manner. This was a part which I could connect to easily since I had seen my grand mother observe the same decorum when guests came to the house.

The book, The English Teacher, with its distinct plot, depicts the futility of the very concept, that life can always be conventional and logical and predictable. The ironies of life and, indeed, the record of the realities of sustenance ideally take the story to a level where the unpredictability so very well harmonises with predictability.

Reader Response does Differ from Age Group to Age Group

Most of the themes of the novel were noticed by me only in the latter reading of the novel after I gained some knowledge about the study of books. In the first reading of the novel, I observed only the main theme of the novel, i.e. that of life and death. But regardless of the magnitude to which technical knowledge can aid in literary analysis, there is no substitute for an initial response to the reading of a text. In case I would have proceeded without an unbiased response I would not have been able to appreciate the text as a whole.

Thus, we can say that the creation of meaning in the mind of reader is a continuous process. Every interaction of the reader with the text results in a different interpretation thereby giving scope for change in meaning.

Waiting for the Mahatma

Plot Summary

Waiting for the Mahatma is a 1955 novel by R. K. Narayan. Sriram is a high school graduate who lives with his grandmother in Malgudi, the fictional Southern Indian town in which much of Narayan's fiction takes place. Sriram is attracted to Bharati, a girl his age who is active in Mahatma Gandhi's Quit India movement, and he becomes an activist himself. He then gets involved with anti-British extremists, causing much grief to his grandmother. Sriram's underground activity takes place in the countryside, an area alien to him, and the misunderstandings with the locals provide the book's best comic moments. After spending some time in jail, Sriram is reunited with Bharati, and the story ends with their engagement amidst the tragedy of India's partition in 1947.

Waiting for the Mahatma is written in Narayan's gentle comic style. An unusual feature of this novel is the participation of Gandhi as a character. His revolutionary ideas and practices are contrasted with the views of traditionalists such as the town's notables and Sriram's grandmother. The political struggle serves as a background to Sriram and Bharati's unconventional romance which is concluded outside either's family circle. This is one of Narayan's most successful novels, where much happens behind the façade of the low key storytelling.

Mahatma Gandhi's nationalism often evokes images of the spinning wheel, Indian masses dressed in hand spun cotton chanting in praise or protest, or Gandhi himself fasting to inspire peace. Gandhi's controversial reconfiguring of these supposedly folk symbols into a language of vernacular images ultimately makes his anti-imperial resistance and construct of India both nonwestern and modern. Here we compare and contrast representations of Gandhi in Mulk Raj Anand's Untouchable and R.K. Narayan's Waiting for the Mahatma to contend that the impasse each novel's protagonist reaches arises from his struggle to choose between those nationalists who promise belonging to all who refuse western influence in symbolic protest and those who support western technologies that liberate the marginalised from menial labour and its stigmas. I conclude that fictions by Anand and Narayan are modern in their treatment of Gandhi's subversive resistance and unmask how the language of symbols can become propaganda that perpetuates and exploits the desire to belong.

Who doesn't know the role of Mahatma Gandhi in the independence movements? Who doesn't know how scared the British Raj was of this 'half naked fakir'? But little do people know about his enormous influence on the masses. Little do people know about the hundreds of people who made the movements?

Waiting for the Mahatma is set in the backdrop of the freedom struggle of Indian independence from Quit India Movement to after Independence. The 256 page story can be said in less than 256 words, Sriram sees Bharati when she visits Malgudi with Gandhiji and falls in love with her, He joins Gandhiji and the freedom movement to be with her and impress her, In that course he comes in contact with other freedom fighters and kind of follows Netaji for some time Bharati and Sriram are jailed, Sriram is freed post independence, As Bharati had insisted, Sriram asks for Bharati's hand from Gandhiji. Gandhiji accepts their decision to marry. But what is missing in the above outline is the impact of freedom struggle on ordinary freedom fighters whose names couldn't find place in the history books whose portraits couldn't make it to the museums whose heroic stories couldn't live longer than them. Waiting for the Mahatma describes the life of such freedom fighters and the contemporary socio-political situation in amazing details.

Bharati's character is an epitome of a devotee of Gandhiji. Her life had nothing apart from her Bapu. Wish of her bapu was a command for her. The fact that she went to jail as a political prisoner and then post independence went around the dangerous riot stricken areas following Gandhiji testifies to the blind faith Bharati had in Mahatma. The character of Bharati is an indication of the charisma of Gandhiji and his influence on his followers. Sriram's character is like a person next door. The only aim he had was to 'get' Bharati the aim of his freedom struggle was not to free India. Neither he is too idealistic nor too realistic. Jagadish's character represents the unknown freedom fighters whose ideology changes with time – sometimes following Gandhiji and sometimes Netaji, His leading a very ordinary life post independence goes to say that not all who fought for the nation became ministers in the new government or heroes in local areas, they, post independence, became like any other person. One wonders, then, what motivated them to play their life out for the nation? Sriram, at least, had Bharati to play for.

As the quest of Sriram meandered from pre-independence to post independence, the reader gets a feel of the society. The fact that Sriram's grandmother was not allowed to enter the village after she was found alive at her cremation pyre hints not only at the superstition the people indulged in but also the lack of doctors who could distinguish between life and death. Sriram's tenure in the jail hinted at the horrors of the jail and how one gets used to worst of conditions. Sriram's interaction with the hotel waiter after his release from jail post independence threw light on the problems ordinary people were facing due to the nascent, inexperienced government. However, the riot sequence when Sriram was travelling to Delhi brought out, very subtly, the horrors of Hindu-Muslim riots on the pretext of formation of Pakistan.

The best sequence, according to me, was the last sequence. It was really poignant. Mahatma Gandhi gave consent to Sriram and Bharati for their marriage. He even agrees to do the 'kanyadan' himself the very next morning. But, while going for the daily prayer, he told Bharati that he som how feels that he cannot make it to the wedding and tells them that the wedding should take place the next morning no matter what. He then enters the prayer hall. Bharati and Sriram also joins the prayer. A man briskly walks past the crowd towards the dais. He pushes Bharati. Sriram, realizing the duty of a husband, rebukes the man back. The man doesn't give him a heed and walks on. In no time, he is in front of the dais and in no time Mahatma Gandhi is assassinated.

The title of the book is apt. In the whole story Sriram is waiting for Bharati who in turn is waiting for Mahatma's consent. The conversation between the characters in the book sounded too artificial to me. Those were the only time when the lost pace. The book can make a good bed time read if one is used to it. It can also help if one wants to start bed time reading.

The Guide

The Guide is a 1958 novel written in English by the Indian author R. K. Narayan. It is one of the author's most critically acclaimed novels. Like most of his works the novel is based in Malgudi, the fictional town in South India. The novel describes the transformation of the protagonist, Raju from a tour guide to a spiritual guide.

The setting of R.K. Narayan's novel, The Guide, as in most of his novels, is Malgudi, a fictional town in southern India. The novel is told through a series of flashbacks.

Raju, the central character, grows up near a railway station, and becomes a shopkeeper, and then a resourceful tourist guide. He meets Rosie, a beautiful dancer, and her husband, whom Raju nicknames Marco, because the man dresses in a thick jacket and helmet as if undertaking an expedition, like Marco Polo. Marco is a scholar and anthropologist, who is more interested in his research than in his young wife Rosie.

Rosie and Marco engage Raju's services as a tourist guide, and he takes them sightseeing. She wants to see a king cobra dancing; Marco wants to study cave paintings. Rosie and Marco quarrel constantly, and Marco remains cold and aloof toward Rosie. While Marco is away studying cave paintings, Raju falls in love with Rosie. When Marco discovers that Raju and Rosie have become lovers, Marco abandons her and returns to Madras.

Raju becomes infatuated with Rosie. He is so obsessed with Rosie that he forgets his business, falls into debt, and loses his shop at the railway station. He also loses his mother's respect because he is living with a married woman. Raju's mother moves out of their house, and the house is claimed to pay off his debts. Raju encourages Rosie to resume her career as a dancer, and becomes her manager, launching her on a successful career as an interpreter of Bharat Natya, the classical dance of India. But he spends money extravagantly, and is tricked by Marco into forging Rosie's signature for a package of her jewels, a mistake that earns him a two-year prison sentence.

On his release from prison, Raju stops to rest near an abandoned temple, where a villager named Velan mistakes him for a holy man. Raju does not want to return in disgrace to his friends in Malgudi, and reluctantly decides to play the part of a holy man. He is happy to accept the daily offering of food which the villagers bring him. Gradually he accepts the role which has been thrust upon him, and he acts as spiritual advisor to the village community.

Raju is content with the arrangement, until a drought occurs, and, to save face, he has to take up a 12-day fast. As a great crowd gathers to watch him during his ordeal, he begins to believe in the role he has created. He has taken on an unselfish task, not for love or money, for the first time in his life. Despite grave danger to his health, he continues to fast until he collapses. His legs sag down as he feels that the rain is falling in the hills. The ending of the novel leaves unanswered the question of whether he dies, or whether the drought has really ended.

A central theme of the novel is the transformation of Raju from his role as a tour guide to that of a spiritual guide. The title of the novel, The Guide, has a double meaning, and Raju is in a sense a double character. As a tour guide and lover, he is impulsive, unprincipled, and self-indulgent. After his imprisonment, and after his transformation as a holy man, he is careful, thoughtful, and self-disciplined.

The novel also tells two stories, that of Raju's relationship with Rosie, and that of Raju's relationship with the villagers as a holy man. The novel begins with Raju sitting beside the temple and meeting the villager named Velan, who mistakes him for a holy man. The novel then alternates between an account of Raju's career as a holy man, which is told in the third-person, and Raju's account to Velan of his previous career as a tour guide and lover, which is told in the first-person. This dualism reflects the dualism in Raju's character. He is transformed from a sinner to a saint, though he is never truly a sinner, and never truly a saint. Because of his capacity for empathy, Raju is a sympathetic character throughout the novel.

Plot Summary

Raju is a railway guide who becomes obsessed with Rosie, the neglected wife of an anthropologist Marco. Rosie has a passion for dancing which Marco doesn't approve of. Rosie, encouraged by Raju, decides to follow her dreams and walks out on her husband. Raju becomes her stage manager and soon with the help of Raju's marketing tactics, Rosie becomes a successful dancer. Raju, however, develops an inflated sense of self-importance and tries to control Raju gets involved in a case of forgery and gets a two year sentence. After completing the sentence, Raju is passing through a village when he is mistaken for a sadhu (a spiritual guide). Reluctant not having to return in disgrace to Malgudi, he stays in an abandoned temple.

There is a famine in the village and Raju is expected to keep a fast to get the rains. With media publicizing his fast, a huge crowd gathers (much to Raju's resentment) to watch him fast. After fasting for several days, he goes to the riverside one morning as part of his daily ritual, where his legs sag down as he feels that the rain is falling in the hills. The ending of the novel leaves unanswered the question of whether he dies, or whether the drought has really ended.

Character of Rosie

Rosie is one of the main characters of the novel "The Guide" by R.K. Narayan. She is presented in the novel as a beautiful dancer, of the Devadasi variety of temple dancers, and the wife of Marco. Her marriage has been like a curse in disguise to her as Marco is totally engrossed in his career and is totally apathetic and unemotional to her. She is very passionate about dancing but her husband does not allow her to dance. She tries to persuade her husband and bears all the insults by him just for the sake that she will be able to get permission to dance. When she was left by Marco in Malgudi and was living with Raju she devoted herself completely to dancing. She woke early in the morning and practiced hard for three hours regularly. She is always willing to talk about dance and even tries to teach Raju some tips of it.

She is religious by nature as she believes in Goddess Saraswati and have the bronze image of Nataraja in her office. She doesn't discriminate people on the basis of their financial status. On one hand when Raju prefers to meet people who are very rich and influential in the society Rosie doesn't care much about these people. Being herself an artist she respects art and likes to be in the company of artist and other music lovers.

Her success doesn't get to her head as she remains a down to earth person even after becoming very successful in her dancing career. Once Raju became very upset as Rosie spent lot of time with different artists and not with him. He came to her and said that these artists come to her because they are inferior to her then she replies to him saying that she is tired of all the talk of superior and inferior and doesn't believe in all these things.

She is also like a traditional Indian wife. Her husband is like God to her. Marco calls her dancing skills as street acrobatics and compares it to monkey dance. Despite all these insults, she continues to be his wife. When Marco came to know about the intimacy between her and Raju he became very upset and didn't talk to her and completely ignored her presence. She apologised to him and kept on following him like a dog hoping that his mind would change one day but that did not happen. This incident shows her tremendous tolerance power and her optimistic attitude. Even after she became very successful in her career and independent of her husband Marco she still had his photo which meant that she still considered Marco to be her husband and highlights her traditional Indian wife kind of character.

Raju 'Guide': The Politics Of Martyrdom

> "....Some are born great, some achieve greatness and
> some have greatness thrown upon them." —Act v. Sc.i
> Twelfth Night, Shakespeare

The Guide is the most complex of R.K. Narayan's novels and its protagonist Raju, the most completely and incisively drawn character. From innocent childhood to the trying times of his adult life, Raju undergoes a number of experiences—experiences that arise out of and affect a life lived instinctually without adhering to social ethics. Raju is an outgoing, resourceful, romantic and materialistic young man whose heart obviously rules over his head. In a long series of unscrupulous acts he cuckolds a husband, drives out his old widowed mother, forges Rosie's signature and to top it all plays on the beliefs of innocent villagers. It is on account of a congenital goodness in him and the unique inner compulsion of being naturally helpful that Raju is metamorphosed from an impostor to a martyr. Narayan himself does not waste time in telling us that "it was in his nature to get involved in other people's interests and activities".

We first meet Raju "sitting cross-legged as if it were a throne, beside an ancient shrine" with Velan studying his face with "intense respect"—Raju's spiritual odyssey has already begun. As the Swami, he narrates the story of penance to the villagers, unaware of the ironic twist whereby he himself will be called upon to perform the penance. "He remembered that not long ago he had spoken to them of such a penance, its value and technique. He had described partly out of his head and partly out of traditional accounts he heard his mother narrate".

As the story unfolds, Raju's life takes a dramatic turn after meeting Rosie and subsequently he finds himself perpetually at loggerheads with society at large and his peer group in particular. A short jail sentence for a petty offence does not seem a sufficient expiation. The time is not yet ripe for his salvation, for he has yet to commit the lowliest of all moral crimes—exploiting the blind faith of gullible villagers—the suffering that is to follow shall of course be in direct proportion to his offence. Somewhere along the way, the comic hero ceases to be himself and enters the arena of the Sublime. He overcomes his ego, rejects the physical pleasures of life and from a fake Swami he emerges as a saint. "For the first time in his life he was making an earnest effort, for the first time he was learning the thrill of full application outside money and love; for the first time he was doing a thing in which he was not personally interested".

Contrast this with the Raju of the past when he shamelessly admits, "My philosophy was that while it lasted the maximum money had to be squeezed out ... it filled me with dread that I should be expected to do with less" and the transformation seems to be nothing short of a miracle. Raju's moral and ethical downfall begins with his increasing avarice. His behaviour is typically nouveau riche where sky is the limit for his growing ambitions. Later, however, Raju narrates his story with painful self-awareness and an almost clinical objectivity, attempting several possible explanations for the way things have taken place. On the one hand he suggests simple, preordained fate: "It is written on the brow of some that they shall never be left alone. I am one such, 1 think. Although I never looked for acquaintances, they somehow came looking for me ... I never said 'I don't know.' Not in my nature, I suppose. If I had the inclination to say 'I don't know what you are talking about', my life would have taken a different turn".

At the other extreme, he feels a personal responsibility for his actions and accepts their inevitable consequences: "Even at the moment, it would have all been different if God had given me the sense to follow Gaffur's advice. I should have gone quietly back, leaving Rosie to solve her problem with her husband. That would have saved many sharp twists and turns in my life's course". But this was not to be. Hand in hand, Raju and Rosie step into the tinsel world of glamour and wealth. This also proves to be the beginning of the end of their relationship. Raju's infamous journey downhill is only paralleled by Rosie's graceful and unpretentious rise to fame. As a matter of fact, it is Rosie, who was written off by many as a mere dancing girl of questionable background, who knowledgeably surmises, "I felt all along you were not doing the right things. This is karma. What can we do?".

However, Raju's karma has not yet come full circle—"The best is yet to be", as Browning would have said, and "the last of life for which the first was made" remains to be acted out. The ultimate irony of the story emanates from the astounding transformation of Raju's personality. It is interesting to note that Raju as the Swami gets enamoured by his own new self and naively forgets the limitations of the ordinary mortal hiding inside the almost superhuman manifestation of sainthood. "He was hypnotised by his own voice; he felt himself growing in stature as he saw the upturned faces of the children shining in the half light when he spoke. No one was more impressed with the grandeur of the whole thing than Raju himself". As a result of this conceit and a larger-than-life image of himself, this once prosperous man-about-town is seen standing in knee-deep water with unkempt hair, an overgrown beard and a starving body. So does this qualify Raju to be labelled a tragic hero?

Destiny seems to thwart and reward Raju with a determined thrust and one is constantly reminded of the Greek idea of a powerful fate, which no body can avoid. But the likeness seems to end here because Raju is not a hero in the conventional Greek or Elizabethan sense. He is an ordinary man with neither any great ethical principles nor any compelling tragic flaws. His greatest weakness is his being besotted by Rosie, and his act of knowingly forsaking his mother in that state of infatuation is a turpitude one would like to wish away. His powers of insight are almost negligible for he does not really understand Rosie till the very end. Her sensitivity and guilt are beyond his comprehension as he himself is devoid of these qualities. His life is a series of blunders but he never feels the need for introspection. Raju lives for the present and fails to see any relation between cause and effect.

One must, however, add that in Raju the swindler, there is also an inherent goodness, an underlying streak of saintliness. To give the man his due, we must concede that Raju never consciously works on being a saint nor would he have ever imagined the end he ultimately meets with. In fact, he even contemplates escaping from the temple but feels moved by the recollection of the big crowd of women and children touching his feet and is moved by their faith in him.

Narayan has drawn the dilemma of Raju in a superb manner. Though Raju is an opportunist who uses the villagers for his own survival, it was never his intention to cultivate a false image of himself for their consumption. He is a drifter who seeks refuge in procrastination and would wilfully beat around the bush rather than look at a problem in the eye. His indecisiveness, which is almost Hamlet-like ultimately, brings about his own annihilation.

The question here is whether Raju redeems himself in the end? Should his chequered past be forgiven simply because he was unable to say "no"? It may be argued that he does come clean with Velan with commendable honesty, but with what intentions? Is it a confession or is it a last desperate attempt to get food? Assuming that it is a bit of both, is his subsequent fasting to be looked upon as penance or is it simply a drift situation with fatal consequences? It is here that the story deviates from the standard Aristotelian pattern and makes the validity of Raju as a tragic hero questionable. There is no doubt that Raju is the hero and that the novel ends as a tragedy is also obvious, but do we have a tragic hero on our hands? Traditionally, the readers must empathise with the tragic hero and also experience the feelings of pity and fear along with awe and admiration. Does catharsis of this kind actually take place here, and if it does where is the other essential element, the proverbial 'tragic flaw'?

Conventionally, the tragic flaw inevitably lies within the mental or the emotional make-up of the protagonist himself and eventually leads to his downfall. But The Guide is unique since the hero is exposed for what he is much before the end of the novel. Amazingly, the graph of his fortunes picks up once again—tentatively at first but steadily later—as Raju experiences a second rise, this time not material but a spiritual one. Consequently, the price he has to pay now is not in terms of a short jail sentence but his life itself. Is indecisiveness then to be viewed as a crime deserving punishment of the ultimate kind? Is it only procrastination that takes Raju's life or could the 'flaw' lie elsewhere too? Narayan with his characteristic gentle irony and his uncanny ability to look at the lighter side of life never castigates or condemns Raju. But he does seem to point a finger in another direction, and that is towards the illiterate villagers and their blind faith in another human being. This makes us look at the mental make-up of the people who push Raju on to what ends as a fatal 'spiritual' journey. This may also be an appropriate juncture to examine Raju's metamorphosis in greater detail. What are the circumstances that lead to his fasting; and if both Raju and the villagers wished each other well, then for what and for whom does the erstwhile guide have to die?

At the very beginning of the novel, we have Raju taking refuge in Mangala because he has "nowhere else to go". He tries to tell Velan, the servile villager, "I am not so great as you imagine. I am just ordinary". But Velan nevertheless starts narrating his personal problem in the hope of finding a solution. And soon Raju "experienced a feeling of importance. He felt like an actor who was always expected to utter the right sentence". The reverence is inevitably followed by offerings of bananas, cucumbers, fruit-nuts and milk, food fit for the gods. The villagers bow to touch Raju's feet but are stopped by him though he "felt he was attaining the stature of a saint". Velan wants to bring over his sister to receive the great man's blessings while ironically the latter is thinking, "I wish I had asked him what the age of the girl was. Hope she is uninteresting. I have had enough trouble in life". Though Raju now wants to steer clear of any trouble, he does not seem to have complete control over his roving eye and is "as yet unprepared to take charge of the world's affairs".

Prison life has made Raju tough and any food is good enough for him to eat anytime. As the Swami however, he is particular about first offering it to the ancient statue of an unrecognisable god. Acts such as this and the narration of mythical stories goes down well with the villagers who soon start visiting him as a daily ritual. For the patient Velan of course even half a story is good enough so long as it comes from the lips of the Swami: "He was of the stuff disciples are made of; an unfinished story or an incomplete moral never bothered him; it was all in the scheme of life". Velan, like most others like him is also a staunch believer in fate and destiny. "He drew his fingers across his brow and said, 'Whatever is written here will happen. How can we ever help it?". He believes that if anyone can unravel the mysteries of the universe for the ignorant villager, it is Raju, to the extent that Raju "suddenly felt irritated at the responsibility that Velan was thrusting on him".

As Raju continues with his discourses he "felt that he was growing wings .... Nothing was going to surprise him. He suddenly found himself asking, 'Have I been in a prison or in some sort of transmigration?'. Raju's status as the Swami is firmly established with the news of the 'miracle'. Velan's stubborn sister agrees to the marriage proposal she had been so far rejecting and comes to look upon "Raju as her saviour. She had told everyone, 'He doesn't speak to anyone, but if he looks at you, you are changed". The villagers are by now completely mesmerised and "just sat there on the lower step and looked at Raju and kept looking at him". Raju on the other hand "was beginning to dread his own smartness nowadays" because "he could not open his lips without provoking admiration. This was a dangerous state of affairs". There are endless discussions about Raju among the villagers and conversations such as these are not uncommon:

> "He has renounced the world; he does nothing but meditate."
>
> "It is our good fortune that this great soul should have come to live in our midst."
>
> "Do you know sometimes these Yogis can travel to the Himalayas just by a thought?"

On hearing this exchange the future martyr is "filled with gratitude and prayed that Velan might never come to the stage of thinking that he was too good for food and that he subsisted on atoms from the air". Prophetic thoughts, but Raju decides to let things be since "food was coming to him unasked now. If he went away somewhere else certainly nobody was going to take the trouble to bring him food in return for just waiting for it ... Where could he go now? ... He realised he had no alternative: he must play the role that Velan had given him". With his mind thus made up, Raju "seated himself as usual on the stone slab with beatitude and calm in his face ... he decided to look as brilliant as he could manage, let drop gems of thought from his lips, assume all the radiance available, and afford them all the guidance they required without stint".

Soon enough Raju makes the grand announcement, "I am the new priest of this temple", but is constantly haunted by the thought of being left foodless. What if the villagers were to simply abandon him one day? To keep the devotion of the villagers in tact, Railway Raju evolves into an educationist and a social reformer: "I like to see young boys become literate and intelligent ... It's our duty to make everyone happy and wise". Lectures are delivered on assorted topics—godliness, cleanliness, the Ramayana and characters from the epics. Several months, perhaps years, pass and Raju, now formally called the Swami by his congregation, looks a different man with a "beard (that) now caressed his chest, his hair covered his back and around his neck he wore a necklace of prayer-beads. His eyes shone with softness and compassion, the light of wisdom' emanated from them ... he lost interest in accumulation of things ... and gave them all back to the women and children".

The gifts however soon start shrinking in size and volume. Summer continues and there is no sign of rain. The river goes down, wells dry up and the cattle are unable to yield milk. The villagers are apprehensive and desperate and the streets look deserted. Women move around with empty water-pots balancing on their heads and want Raju to tell them when it is going to rain. "Raju merely raised a hand and waved it as if to say, 'Be peaceful; everything will be alright; I will fix it with the gods".

Cholera breaks out in the neighbouring village and cattle are found dead here and there. Along with the prices of commodities, tempers too rise high and violence breaks out. Velan and his men pick up axes and knives and after injuring many, end up with cuts and burns themselves. Soon however they are getting ready for another fight. "Raju was amazed at the way things were moving. He did not know what he was expected to do now, whether to bless their expedition or prevent it. Personally, he felt that the best thing for them would be to blow one another's brains out. That'd keep them from bothering too much about the drought".

However, he does realise that the violence must be brought to an end. To convey anything, Raju needs a messenger and unfortunately the only one available in these troubled times is Velan's twenty-one year old brother, a semi-moron and a dimwit. Raju instructs this messenger of peace, "Tell your brother, immediately, wherever he may be, that unless they are good I'll never eat". The boy scampers off to the village and says, "The Swami ... doesn't want food any more ... because... because - it doesn't rain". And so Raju's fate is zealed by a village idiot.

The villagers marvel at their good fortune at having such a great soul in their midst. "He is like Mahatma. When Mahatma Gandhi went without food, how many things happened in India! This is a man like that. If he fasts there will be rain', they conclude happily". Raju, blissfully unaware of the turn of events, is contemplating some new recipes while waiting for his usual gifts and food. The villagers arrive shortly in a congenial group making Raju feel satisfied that his ploy for peace had worked. Soon he is told, "You are a Mahatma. We should consider ourselves blessed indeed to be able to touch the dust of your feet...... (Raju) began to think that his personality radiated a glory .... as a matter of fact, it seemed possible that he himself might bow low, take the dust off his own feet, and press it to his eyes".

Assuming that all is well now, Raju grandly announces that he shall take his usual food the next day only to be asked by Velan, "Do you expect it to rain tomorrow, sir?" To his horror Raju discovers that he is expected to fast for two weeks, stand in knee-deep water everyday and chant a mantra in order to bring the rains.

He remembers telling the villagers, "When the time comes....the man who would bring you the rain will appear, all of a sudden". With a sinking heart, Raju gets "down from his pedestal ... That seat had acquired a glamour, and as long as he occupied it people would not listen to him as to an ordinary mortal. He now saw the enormity of his own creation. He had created a giant with his puny self, a throne of authority with that slab of stone".

Regretfully Raju recalls having quoted from a Tamil poem that if there were one good man anywhere, the rains would descend for his sake and benefit the whole world. The villagers have dutifully imbibed every word he has ever uttered and are now intent on putting their acquired wisdom to practice. There is only one way out for Raju now—escape. Escape from the village, from being the Swami and escape from the sentence of starvation.

But here the good in him takes over and his conscience does not allow him to betray the faith his followers have reposed in him. And so Raju alias Swami stays on, resigned to taking each day as it comes. "Perhaps even at this point he might have rectified the whole thing with a frank statement ... by habit, his nature avoided the direct and bald truth even now." Better sense ultimately prevails and he takes Velan into confidence and confesses, "I am not a saint, Velan, I am just an ordinary human being like anyone else" and without any omission or distortion every detail of his chequered past emerges.

On completing his story, with baited breath, Raju waits for reprieve and condemnation "as if he waited on a judge's verdict again, a second time. The judge here seemed to be of sterner cast than the one he had encountered in the court-hall" but nothing changes for Velan and he continues to address Raju as Swami promising that the great soul's secret would remain safe with his humble devotee forever. An uncanny thought crosses Raju's mind, "This man will finish me before I know where I am".

Public interest is roused in Raju's fast. The government enquires into the drought conditions and with it arrives a press correspondent. Raju loses all privacy as crowds swell everyday. People arrive from far and near to take a look at the Swami meditating, while all that Raju wants to say is, "Get out, all of you, and leave me alone, I am not the man to save you". All leftover food is over and Raju is enraged at the emptiness of his larder and irritated with Velan who he knows is the single man responsible for his present plight. Raju however is touched by the man's devotion and for fasting on alternate days in sympathy and "providing the great man concerned with every comfort, except, of course, food." Soon Raju makes a vindictive resolution, "I'll chase away all thought of food. For the next ten days I shall eradicate all thoughts of tongue and stomach from my mind".

This is a turning point in Raju's penance, which so far has been somewhat of a sham. He derives a peculiar strength from his resolution and convinces himself, "If by avoiding food I should help the trees bloom, and the grass grow, why not do it thoroughly?". Physically weak, Raju is increasingly unaware of the sea of humanity around him. "Lack of food gave him a peculiar floating feeling, which he rather enjoyed, with the thought in the background, 'This enjoyment Velan cannot take away from me".

The small village soon becomes a centre of frenzied activity. Special trains and buses ferry people across to Mangala, film shows on malaria, tuberculosis, plague and mosquitoes are on, the Tea Propaganda Board sets up stalls, and health inspectors do the rounds while a merry-go-round whines all day. Gambling booths are doing brisk business even as people are watching informative films on dams, river valleys and various other projects. The post-office is choked with mail for the fasting Swami while some lesser mortals have decided to help the Swami through his ordeal by singing devotional songs to the accompaniment of a harmonium and tabla. The place is crawling with representatives of the Press, the most conspicuous of them being an American journalist who interviews the Swami in English. "I am doing only what I have to do; that's all. My likes and dislikes do not count," says a fast fading Raju—a loaded statement whose irony is lost upon all present.

Cameras are focussed on the spot from where Raju starts walking towards the erstwhile river, the place where he stands for two hours and prays and where he subsequently meditates. "While business is booming for many, Raju's kidneys are failing and his blood pressure is abnormal. It is the last day of the fast and the crowd has trebled. Raju"s condition is grave but doctors' appeal to him to break his fast falls on deaf ears. Raju whispers, 'Help me to my feet' and pulls himself along to go for his prayers. He can hardly stand on his own.....They held him as if he were a baby. Raju opened his eyes, looked about, and said, 'Velan, it's raining in the hills. I can feel it coming up under my feet, up my legs ...' He sagged down".

It is common knowledge that most Indians believe in God and the efficacy of prayers. The hours we spend on religious activities such as keertans, rituals, ceremonies, pilgrimages, discourses and fasting add up to an impressive total. India would also be holding the dubious distinction of harbouring the largest population of people living in ashrams, some moving around from place to place in 'search for truth', fake godmen and self-proclaimed swamis. Short of being declared an industry, religion touches the lives of all Indians one way or the other. It may not be inappropriate for international airports in India to flaunt signboards advising unsuspecting tourists to be 'beware of gods'.

Most Indians are familiar with the concepts of detachment, other worldliness, prayer, meditation, vanaprastha and sanyasa. At the rustic level, worship of snakes, trees and local deities is not uncommon and neither are instances of women being visited and possessed by the mother goddess. In such a mysterious land where people readily believe that yogis can fly to the Himalayas just by a thought or walk on water through sheer power of concentration and where statues consume milk on certain days, it is not at all strange that a sinner is mistaken for a saint. It is the compelling influence of the hoary tradition of India that can transform ex-prisoners into martyrs. Raju's metamorphosis at the end of the novel is reminiscent of the Ratnakar-Valmiki myth. Such miracles are not incredible in India where belief is far more important than knowledge. Despite the invasion of the West, the relevance of classical myths in modem life remains unchanged.

Narayan himself comments elsewhere: "With the impact of modem literature we began to look at our gods, demons, and sages, not as some remote concoctions but as types and symbols possessing psychological validity, even when seen against the contemporary background" ("English in India", Commonwealth Literature). Is it not possible then that Narayan, though an upholder of old and traditional values, is in this unique novel holding the inhabitants of Mangala responsible for the slow and torturous death of his hero? Is this also not one of Narayan's most brilliant strokes of genius by which he has subtly externalised the 'tragic flaw' of the situation and lessened the burden of Raju? Our innocuous protagonist can certainly not be allowed to go scot-free without owning partial responsibility for his fate, but are the villagers not equally responsible? Is not their offence, though committed in and on account of ignorance, greater and far graver? In the ultimate analysis is it not India, Indians and their misplaced beliefs that take the life of an ordinary fellow human being? All in good faith of course!

It is an irony of no mean degree that a situation is created in which Raju who at one time specialises in throwing convention to the winds is put under such moral pressure as to succumb completely in physical terms. Whether any constructive result has been achieved by Raju's penance is immaterial—what matters eventually is that an individual is pushed into seeking his salvation in accordance with the so-called great Indian tradition.

The mammoth gathering, the food stalls, the presence of the media and the involvement of the local authorities leaves hardly any strata of Indian society untouched by the event. Anyone who is even remotely familiar with the Indian psyche and its insatiable appetite for idols coupled with its expertise at placing ordinary mortals on a pedestal, can safely assume that the spot where Raju finally collapses would certainly have evolved into a holy site. Over the years his shrine would eventually acquire the status of a tourist attraction. Several Rosies would visit it looking for peace of mind, countless mothers would camp there in the hope of finding their lost sons, a few Marcos would dig into its past and any number of Rajus would certainly drive up from Malgudi accompanying wide-eyed tourists.

The Guide may not have the perfect tragic hero, but in an unparalleled ironic feat, Narayan has certainly brought us face to face with a unique 'tragic villain' in the form of Velan and his friends, who are blissfully unaware of their act of killing with kindness.

The Man-eater of Malgudi

Plot Summary

The Man-Eater of Malgudi is a 1961 Indian novel, written in English by R. K. Narayan. It revolves around the life of a printer named Nataraj, who lives in a huge ancestral house. He leads a contented lifestyle, with his own circle of friends, such as a poet, Sen, a Journalist and Sastri, his assistant whom Nataraj respects very much. One day, a taxidermist named Vasu arrives at the office of Nataraj and demands the printing of 100 visiting cards. Although Nataraj does this, Vasu seems to have no intention of paying him.

Vasu is a type of a bully, and is often compared to a Rakshasa (a Demon) by Nataraj and Sastri. Vasu takes up residence in the attic of Nataraj's house, and does not pay him any money or sign any contract based on the rent. Vasu is a muscleman, proud of his strength. As the story continues, Vasu encroaches on Nataraj's life, and scares away his friends, his customers and so on.

One day, Nataraj decides to hold a function to commemorate the release of a book of poetry by the poet friend of his. Later he learns that Vasu plans to shoot an elephant for his collection in the poccession of Nataraj's friend. The protagonists frantically try to stop him, but in vain. As Nataraj decides to talk to Vasu for once and for all, he finds Vasu sleeping, but the next morning he discovers that Vasu is dead.

The autopsy takes place, with the verdict being that he was not poisoned and that there are no signs of physical injury. The case is declared closed, but the reputation of Nataraj's press is ruined and his friends and other people start avoiding him. Later, Nataraj learns from Rangi, a woman who was familiar with Vasu, that Vasu was not murdered, but died in the attempt to smash a fly sitting on his temple. He had damaged one of his nerves with his powerful hands and died instantly. Now Nataraj is rid of Vasu, and the story ends on the note that all demons, rakshashas and monsters are the downfall of themselves.

The Role of Myth in the Man Eater of Malgudi

In R.K. Narayan's book The Man-Eater of Malgudi, there exists a deep mythical structure. The story of the peaceful printer Nataraj who must overcome the demon like

Vasu is structured very much like a myth. As myths and spirituality are implicit in Hindu society, the world of Malgudi is full of mythical elements. To complement these mythical elements, comparisons and references are made to various Hindu myths throughout the book, which act as signposts to the significance of what is going on in the story itself. The myths referred to give us greater insight into the action and into the characters themselves, by showing us more subtle aspects of the story which are juxtaposed against the myths. In The Man-Eater of Malgudi, myths serve to shed light on what is really going on in the world of Malgudi.

The battle between Vasu and Nataraj is framed perfectly in the context of myth. The action that occurs in the novel bears many similarities to other myths that are either mentioned or alluded to, in particular the Ramayana and the myth of Bhasmasura. The structure of the story is the same as a myth, with the protagonist facing an unstoppable enemy who eventually meets his end by his own hand.

To complement the mythical structure of the book, many references and allusions are made to other myths. Sastri is the one who seems to be the most associated with the scriptures and ancient wisdom, and serves to link the myths with reality. Rangi is also an important figure in this respect, not only through her name (which means Krishna) and the role she plays in the "rescue" of Kumar, but also through her reference to the notion of Dharma. The notion of Dharma and its complement, the notion of Moksa, put several of the characters in a new light. It is particularly interesting to look at the character of Nataraj with respect to his devotion. He at first appears to be completely and totally devoted, but we see that this is not necessarily true when put in the proper context.

The battle between Vasu and Nataraj, which makes up the storyline of the book, is structured like a myth. Even before we meet Vasu, we feel his impact by the silence that he causes amongst the regulars of Nataraj's printing shop. His first act is to violate the sanctity of Nataraj's back room, a symbol for the inner sanctum of the temple. Vasu's body is characterised by his bull-neck and hammer-fist, characteristics which make him seem more like a beast than a man, and his "black halo" which immediately tells us that he is an evil figure.

In Vasu's account of his life, he describes how he crippled his mentor, showing an utter lack of gratitude for the man who taught him and provided for him. In very little time, Vasu has shown disdain for almost everything that Nataraj holds dear: the caste system; the path of non-violence; respect for one's elders; the sanctity of the family and of chastity; and the sanctity of life itself. He even shows that he is not above killing something that is part of Nataraj's family when he kills Nataraj's cat. The only thing left for him to insult is Nataraj's devotion to the gods. Vasu does so when he kills a tiger, a symbol of Shiva, and a Garuda (eagle), said to be the messenger of Vishnu.

When Vasu plans to kill the temple elephant, it amounts to a direct attempt on the life of a god. Kumar is a sacred being associated with the temple, and represents the God Ganesha. Vasu is no longer just a killer of animals who disturbs the existence of Nataraj, but a true Rakshasa (demon) who threatens to destroy Nataraj's way of life. As many demons have before, Vasu threatens to destroy an entire world, in this case the world of Nataraj. Nataraj later reflects that "The man-eater had destroyed my name, my friendships, and my world,". Vasu forces Nataraj to take action against him, which he does (as have many mythical protagonists before him).

Vasu, however, eventually meets his end by his own hand. In trying to squash a mosquito that had landed on his head, his incredible strength crushes not only the fly, but Vasu himself by causing a fatal concussion. Vasu had, in a way, revealed his weakness when he said earlier "Night or day, I run when a mosquito is mentioned,". The death of Vasu is compared to the death of the demon Bhasmasura who is tricked into placing his hands on his head by Krishna (disguised as a dancer) and is scorched to death by his fatal touch. Vasu's death mirrors that of Bhasmasura in more than just that respect. Rangi's name (which comes from Ragna or Ragnatha) means Krishna, she is the temple dancer, and she is present at the death of Vasu (whether a direct cause or not).

Vasu is like a Rakshasa in many ways. His extraordinary strength and appearance are obvious indicators that Vasu is not a normal man. Nataraj also describes Vasu as possessing a "sixth sense". Vasu seems to leave devastation in his wake, whether it be leaving the man who taught him crippled, turning Nataraj's attic into a tanning factory, or annihilating the wildlife of Mempi forest. His killing of the sacred animals shows his disrespect for the gods, another feature of demons. When Vasu "kidnaps" Nataraj and leaves him stranded far from home, we can see a parallel between that event and the kidnapping of Sita by Ravana in the Ramayana.

As well, he is seen as a super-human creature, a giant, by the town children (who are often the ones who identify disguised demons in myths and legends, because of their purity). He is also suspected to have poisoned Kumar, causing his illness. In the Vedas, illness is attributed to demons. If these indications were not enough to tell us that Vasu was a demon figure, there are the direct comparisons of Vasu to various demons that Sastri makes on pages 72-73.

Sastri is the character who seems to link myth (or religion) and reality. His name means "man of scriptures". He possesses ancient wisdom which seems to perfectly frame everything that is going on in the novel. He is the one who draws the comparison between Vasu and the Rakshasas. As well, he is the one who seems to be in charge of Nataraj's "inner sanctum" at the press. He performs pujas early on in the book, and makes pilgrimages to holy sites near the end. He is the one who puts Vasu's death (and the death of all demons) into perspective by saying "...every demon carries within him, unknown to himself, a tiny seed of self-destruction". On page 105, Sastri seems to predict the astrological cataclysm that will occur due to the aspecting of Jupiter. He says "If a fly settles on your nose at a crucial moment and annoys you, you may treat it as an astrological setback worked off". This does not appear to be something cataclysmic, but the mosquito which lands on Vasu's head at an inopportune moment has a very large impact on the outcome of the story. He is also the one who discovers the truth of how Vasu met his end by asking Rangi (or Krishna, as her name denotes) how he met his end. In that respect, as in many others, Sastri is the finder of truth.

The figure of Rangi is a very interesting one for several reasons. She is the temple prostitute, and in being a woman of the temple, she is technically married to the god of that temple, who is in this case Krishna. Yet her name means Krishna itself, and she plays the role of Krishna in the death of Vasu (with respect to the death of Bhasmasura). She is both the highest woman and the lowest woman. She is openly looked down upon, yet she merits at least a name, unlike Nataraj's wife. An contrast emerges between her and Vasu when the light creates a "halo" around her and contrasts Vasu's halo of black hair. This also seems to suggest that she is some sort of angel, if Vasu and his black halo represent a demon, creating an interesting juxtaposition of prostitute and angel.

Rangi also makes a very important comment when she says "Sir, I am only a public woman, following what is my dharma,". It is said that if a prostitute performs her dharma scrupulously, then she acquired great powers. This is illustrated by the story of the prostitute who makes the river Ganges flow upstream because of the powers she received by following her dharma. This gives us a new way of looking at the death of Vasu. If we are meant to believe that Rangi has followed her dharma and acquired some sort of higher power, then Rangi could have caused Vasu to end his life through the blow to his head, as Krishna led Bhasmasura to end his life in a similar manner.

With the notion of dharma introduced by Ragni (or Krishna), the notion of moksa comes into play, because the two are interminably linked. In the novel, we see all three ways to liberation from the cycle of life and death, as described by Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita. Ragni is the example of one who follows the path of unselfish action (karma yoga), or following one's dharma. She is so unselfish that she is even willing to risk her personal happiness for the sake of the temple by aiding Nataraj in his attempt to stop Vasu from killing Kumar. Sastri is an example of one who follows the path of knowledge (jnana yoga). He is obviously familiar with many of the Hindu texts, performs all necessary rituals, and makes pilgrimages to holy sites. Muthu is the character that most exemplifies the path of devotion (Bhakti Yoga). He does whatever he can to save his temple elephant, does much to improve the Mempi temple, observes the proper offerings to the temple goddess, and never visibly strays from the path of devotion.

Nataraj at first appears to be one who follows the path of devotion. When we first see his daily routine, he shows his devotion through his ritual bathing and prayer to the sun. He does all he can to help Kumar, and even sheds blood for him. However, Nataraj's devotion on several occasions seems questionable. On the day that Sastri performs his Satyanarayana Puja (a tribute to Visnu performed by Brahmin on full-moon days), Nataraj does nothing. Although Nataraj does much to organise the procession to celebrate the marriage of Krishna, at one point he says that he "enjoyed the status of being more important than the procession".

This would certainly not be an indication of his humility before the gods, or even respect for Krishna. A large part of devotion is chastity. While Nataraj is never unfaithful to his wife with Rangi, he is tempted on several occasions. However, this could be considered an indication of Nataraj's devotion if he actually resisted the temptation, and wasn't just too shy to confront Rangi.

Nataraj is also taken in by Vasu's talk of science. He takes the stuffed tiger and keeps it, thereby keeping the memory of the murderous Vasu alive, as well as keeping Vasu's science of taxidermy in Malgudi (not to mention the implications of trapping Shiva in the Queen Anne desk). When Nataraj is mounting the stairs to Vasu's apartment, he says that the rational thing for a person to do is to approach things in a scientific frame of mind, and sympathises with Vasu's frustration at the world's lack of scientific approach. In a way, science has already failed Nataraj once. In the Atharva Veda, the way of dealing with illness is by exorcising the demon who caused it. Nataraj has taken Kumar to the doctor, and he is no longer sick. But Kumar's life is still in danger because Nataraj has not dealt with Vasu, the demon who caused Kumar's illness. All these things show that Nataraj is not truly devoted to the gods, although he appears to be at first.

In the Man-Eater of Malgudi, myth highlights the deeper meaning in the society of Malgudi. With each myth mentioned or alluded to, the content of the story is put into a new light. The mythical structure of the story is perfectly complemented by all the references and allusions to various myths which occur throughout the story. Each reference gives an aspect of the story a new dimension by putting it against the framework of the myth. The world of Malgudi portrayed in the book is taken to a new level of meaning by the many mythical references and allusions made.

The Vendor of Sweets

Plot Summary

The Vendor of Sweets is a 1967 English novel by R. K. Narayan. The main characters are Jagan and his son Mali. It revolves around the issues arising from the generation gap between father and son. Narayan in his superb style narrates the principled life-story of Jagan.

Jagan, an orthodox Hindu Brahmin and owner of a sweet shop, is a simple and hard-working man. He is a follower of Gandhian principles and is proud of his role in India's freedom struggle during his youth. He wears hand spun cloth that signifies purity to him. In his early days Jagan loses his wife Ambika because of his belief in nature cures. He had never spent much time with his wife, something that causes discontent in his son Mali. Mali, without his father's permission discontinues his education, and goes to America. A few years later, he comes back very Westernised and brings along an American girl, Grace. He tells his father that they are already married, which causes great disappointment to Jagan. Jagan however develops an affection for his daughter-in-law and feels Mali is not giving her the attention she deserves.

Soon Mali expresses a desire to start a machine factory with some partners from America. He asks his father to invest in this factory. Jagan is unwilling, which causes friction between Jagan and Mali. Troubled by the turmoil, Jagan decides to retire from active working. As this is happening, Mali is caught by the police for drunkenness and deserts his wife. Jagan half heartedly assists Mali to get out of prison and provides for Grace to return to America.

The conflict between the old and young generation, their ideals and the generation gap makes 'Vendor of Sweets' a memorable story.

Talkative Man

Talkative Man is a novel by R. K. Narayan first published in 1986 by Heinemann. The book is Narayan's 13th novel. Like his earlier novels, this one is also set in the fictional town of Malgudi. The novel is a bit short by Narayan's standards but provides the same level of enjoyment one experiences with his other writings.

Talkative Man is not a talky book—indeed, Narayan adds a postscript apologizing for its brevity. But there is nothing to apologise for. The story is not slight but economically told; every sentence serves to advance the narrative. And as important as the story is Narayan's masterly way with character and atmosphere. The book, like many of its predecessors,, is rich in garrulous lecturers, insincere politicians, pretentious scholars, gossipy neighbors and the like. Charming and vivid touches abound; I think particularly of the Malgudi stationmaster's solicitous treatment of Rann's wife, whom he allows to live in his waiting room for weeks at a time; of the portraits "of film stars and one or two gods also" in Girija's bedroom; of the riot that ensues when Rann tells a meeting of Malgudi's Lotus Club about the Cannibal Plant; of the gossip disseminated by TM's friends, who know the precise hour and minute of every stage of Rann's liaisons with Girija; and of Girija's grandfather, an old librarian who keeps the crossword page of the newspaper in a drawer behind the counter and enjoins the reading-room habitues: "Copy it down, don't mark on the paper."

The World of Nagaraj

The World of Nagaraj (1990) is a classic piece of literature by R. K. Narayan. It is based in the fictional town of Malgudi, a small town in South India.

Plot Summary

Nagaraj's world is quiet and comfortable. Living in his family's spacious house with only his wife, Sita, and his widowed mother for company, he fills his day writing letters, drinking coffee, doing some leisurely book-keeping for his friend Coomar's Boeing Sari Company, and sitting on his verandah watching the world and planning the book he intends to write about the life of the great sage Narada.

But everything is disturbed when Tim, the son of his ambitious land-owning brother Gopu, decides to leave home and come to live with Nagaraj. Forced to take responsibility for the boy, puzzled by his secret late-night activities and by the strong smell of spirits which lingers behind him, Nagaraj finds his days suddenly filled with unwelcome complication and turbulence, which threaten to forever alter the contented tranquility of his world.

Characters

Nagaraj : A mild mannered man belonging to a wealthy aristocratic family based in Kabir Lane. Bereft of any children himself, he develops a fondness for his elder brother's son, christened Krishnaji, but generally known as Tim. He leads a tranquil life in his ancestral house and nurses grandiloquent plans to write a book on the life of the Sage Narada.

Other characters include - Jayaraj, the photographer, whose shop is located at the Market archway. He sleeps on a wooden bench in front of his shop and is woken up by Nagaraj everyday. Kanni the Paan-wala, the old absent minded priest, Bari the stationery owner and the drunkard engineer and Talkative Man.

Grandmother's Tale

Grandmother's Tale is a novella by R. K. Narayan with illustrations by his brother R. K. Laxman published in 1992 by Indian Thought Publications. It was subsequently released outside India as The Grandmother's Tale by Heinemann in 1993. This book, more than any others, exhibits Narayan's experimental tendencies. The book is about Narayan's great grandmother who is forced to travel far and wide in search of her husband, as narrated to him by his grandmother.

Malgudi Days

Malgudi Days is a collection of short stories by R. K. Narayan published in 1943 by Indian Thought Publications. The book was republished outside India in 1982. The book includes 19 stories, all set in the fictional town of Malgudi. The New York Times described the virtue of the book as "everyone in the book seems to have a capacity for responding to the quality of his particular hour. It's an art we need to study and revive."

In 1986, a few of the stories in the book were included in the Malgudi Days television series, directed by actor and director, Shankar Nag. In his travel book "Their Heads Are Green and Their Hands Are Blue," Paul Bowles rather despairingly quotes W.H. Auden's remark that "in a not remote future, it will be impossible to distinguish human beings living on one area of the earth's surface from those living on any other." Mr. Bowles goes on to say, "My own belief is that the people of the alien cultures are being ravaged not so much by the byproducts of our civilisation, as by the irrational longing on the part of members of their own educated minorities to cease being themselves and become Westerners."

The people in R.K. Narayan's fictional city of Malgudi are reassuring contradictions of these ominous observations. His is a truly foreign city, almost unimaginably different from any of ours. His people are intensely Indian in a sense that we could not say of ourselves: we are intensely American. And in a kind of paradox, their national character adds considerably to their individual character. Being Indian is a "teeming" business, to use John Updike's word for Mr. Narayan's book, and these stories make you wish you could teem with life, too.

Of course many of his people are miserably poor, but it's a shared, structured poverty, furnished with ritual. The nearest parallel to it in the West might be the Bohemian poverty of Greenwich Village in its heyday, or the Left Bank of Paris. One hesitates these touchy days to speak of lively or colourful poverty, as opposed to bored comfort, but it does seem true, at least in Mr. Narayan's stories, that living by one's wits has the effect of sharpening the wits. It makes you wonder about the so-called "brutalizing" effect of poverty in our cities. And for such a poor place Malgudi has a remakable number of people who make their living by entertaining other people, or by bringing them various forms of spiritual relief. There are snake-charmers, fire-eaters, ''universal journalists,'' astrologers and exorcists, to mention just a few. The streets are a never-ending theater, and your neighbor's life is a fat novel, which you are sometimes invited to revise.

Though Mr. Narayan is most often compared to Dickens, he doesn't have Dickens's fullness or roundness of detail, but a kind of multiplicity of detail instead, and he isn't as sentimental as Dickens. He doesn't seem to feel obliged to pity his characters to the degree that Dickens does. But of course it's possible that he sentimentalises them by making them more cheerful than they might realistically be.

Yet the postman who stands and waits for the people on his route to read him their letters is more than a mere civil servant, just as the astrologer who greets a client with, "You look so careworn,'' is more than a simple con man. And someone who can teach a monkey to imitate, an oppressed village daughter-in-law carrying a pitcher of water on her head is as much an artist as an entertainer. Street life in Malgudi is so complex and competitive that one almost has to become an artist to survive.

Some of Mr. Narayan's best stories are benign satires, like the one in which the town council decides to pull down the 20-foot metal statue of a former British governor. Research has exposed him as a tyrant, and the statue is offered free to anyone who will carry it away. After dynamiting it off its pedestal, an enterprising citizen has it pulled away by the temple elephant and 50 men. While trying to decide how best to liquidate it, he keeps it in his small house, where half of the statue sticks out into the street. Then it is discovered that the researchers were mistaken, the man commemorated by the statue was a veritable saint, and it must be re-erected.

There are stories of a boy snake-charmer who cannot get rid of an overaged cobra, of a bachelor who adopts for two hours a lost boy at a fair, and of a schoolboy who sees his dead father, who was an actor, in a movie, where he reads a newspaper just as he did in real life. In one of the best stories, a 100-year-old man reads in his diary of 51 years ago a brief account of a woman he mistreated. On his daily walk, he tries to find the house where she lived, thinking that if she is still alive, he might apologise to her. For a few hours, he is young again.

A doctor, who is proud of the inordinate length of his prescriptions, says to a young man whose mother is supposedly dying, that she is "in a leave-taking mood." A troubled man walking through the streets and hearing "the rustling of leaves overhead and the sound of running water," says, "I was deeply moved by the hour and its quality."

That's the greatest virtue of "Malgudi Days" that everyone in the book seems to have a capacity for responding to the quality of his particular hour. It's an art we need to study and revive.

5

Malgudi The Fictional Town

Malgudi is a fictional, semi-urban town in southern India, conjured by Narayan. He created the town in September 1930, on Vijayadashami, an auspicious day to start new efforts and thus chosen for him by his grandmother.

As he mentioned in a later interview to his biographers Susan and N. Ram, in his mind, he first saw a railway station, and slowly the name Malgudi came to him. The town was created with an impeccable historical record, dating to the Ramayana days when it was noted that Lord Rama passed through; it was also said that the Buddha visited the town during his travels. While Narayan never provided strict physical constraints for the town, he allowed it to form shape with events in the various stories, becoming a reference point for the future. Dr. James M. Fennelly, a scholar of Narayan's works, created a map of Malgudi based on the fictional descriptors of the town from the many books and stories Malgudi evolved with the changing political landscape of India.

In the 1980s, when the nationalistic fervor in India dictated the changing of British names of towns and localities and removal of British landmarks, Malgudi's mayor and city council removed the long standing statue of Frederick Lawley, one of Malgudi's early residents. However, when the Historical Societies showed proof that Lawley was strong in his support of the Indian independence movement, the council was forced to undo all their earlier actions. A good comparison to Malgudi, a place that Greene characterised as "more familiar than Battersea or Euston Road", is Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County. Also, like Faulkner's, when one looks at Narayan's works, the town gets a better definition through the many different novels and stories.

Malgudi, a small South Indian town provides the setting for almost all of Narayan's novels and short stories. Malgudi, of course, does not exist. It is for Narayan, just as Wessex is for Thomas Hardy or Yoknapatawpha for William Faulkner, an imaginary landscape inhabited by the unique characters of his stories. It frees Narayan to his humanistic enterprise.

R. K. Narayan describes his conception of Malgudi: "Malgudi was an earth-shaking discovery for me, because I had no mind for facts and things like that, which would be necessary in writing about Lalgudi or any real place. I first pictured not my town but just the railway station, which was a small platform with a banyan tree, a station master, and two trains a day, one coming and one going. On Vijayadasami I sat down and wrote the first sentence about my town: The train had just arrived in Malgudi Station."

Vijayadasami is the day on which the initiation of learning for a child is celebrated. The above anecdote must have occured around September 1930.

> "Various critics have attempted to identify the original of this mythical town. Iyengar speculates that it might be Lalgudi on the River Cauvery or Yadavagiri in Mydore. Others of the opinion that Narayan's Malgudi is Coimbatore which has many of the landmarks — a river on one side, forests on the other, the Mission School and College, and , all the extensions mentioned in the novels. However, one is not likely to arrive at any definite answer as to its geographical locations, even if one shifts all the references to the town in the novels, such specific allusions as that "Malgudi is almost a day's journey from Madras." The simple reason is that Narayan has not drawn any map of framework for his Malgudi as Faulkner for example, did for his Yoknapatawpha or Hardy had in mind for his Wessex

> novels. ... But all efforts to identify Malgudi have remained futile, for it a pure country of the mind. ... The recurrence of the same landmarks serves to put together the various novels into an organic whole. They may be rightly called Malgudi novels just as Hardy's novels are called Wessex novels. ... Narayan creates his fictional world of Malgudi as an essentially Indian society or town. The Indianness and Indian sensibility prevaded the whole place. Narayan's Malgudi is also a microcosm of India. It grows and develops and expands and changes, and is full of humanity, drawing its sustenance from the human drama that is enacted in it. Like Hardy, Arnold Bennett too writes about Five Towns, also famous as fictional places. For Bennett the Five Towns were provincial. His attitude towards them is always expository in the sense that he explains and exhibits them to an outside world. But for Narayan Malgudi is anything but provincial."

Narayan in an interview discusses some of the reasons why Malgudi had to be a South Indian town:

"I must be absolutely certain about the psychology of the character I am writing about, and I must be equally sure of the background. I know the Tamil and Kannada speaking people most. I know their background. I know how their minds work and almost as if it is happening to me, I know exactly what will happen to them in certain circumstances. And I know how they will react."

Although Narayan never attempted to spell out the landscape to Malgudi, it has been done for him: M. K. Naik has appended a map of Malgudi in his book 'The Ironic Vision' based on the various descriptions of the town to be found in all his stories.

Graham Greene in his introduction to the Financial Expert described Malgudi as a place where you could go "into those loved and shabby streets and see with excitement and a certainty of pleasure a stranger approaching past the bank, the cinema, the haircutting saloon, a stranger who will greet us, we know, with some unexpected and revealing phrase that will open the door to yet another human existence." Beginning with his first novel published in London in 1935, Narayan, now 90 years old, has created a world, the small south Indian town of Malgudi, and gradually peopled it, Chekhov-like, with a great range of convincing characters that together seem to capture the human condition. Malgudi does not exist on the map of India but it certainly exists in thousands of minds: it has, in the words of this new biography of Narayan, "chimerical cartographical status".

A number of scholars, Indian and western, notably William Walsh, have written about Narayan's work and have attempted to relate Malgudi both to Indian reality and to Narayan's life. But, as Susan Ram notes in her engaging introduction to the biography, the critics were hamstrung by a severe lack of biographical information. Narayan is a very private man who, more than most writers, avoids public discussion of his work. In a confidential journal, kept in the 1940s and first published in the biography, Narayan told himself, during a barren period in his writing: "Don't think of the novel as a terrible duty awaiting you. Don't have such an awe of it yourself however impressive it might be to others. To you it must be just a relaxation and joy." He urged himself to recover his original method of writing with "utter indifference, inattention and half-awareness".

Susan Ram, who first came to know south India as a doctoral student in politics at the University of Leeds, and her husband, N. Ram, a well-known journalist, editor and newspaper proprietor who publishes Narayan, have had free access to the author himself, as well as to his family, his private papers, and his and Greene's long and sometimes revealing correspondence. The Rams' biography, which is very much a life up to 1945 and not a critical study, is a milestone in scholarship about Narayan.

Like the early struggles of Satyajit Ray to make his first film, the tale of how Narayan got started as a published novelist is the stuff of legend. In the 1930s, in India, there was no literary market to speak of for a novel in English about Indians, and Narayan therefore looked to London. After Swami and Friends was rejected by a string of publishers, Narayan advised an Indian student friend then in Britain to "weight the manuscript with a stone and drown it in the Thames". But his friend knew several up-and-coming English writers, among them Graham Greene. Greene read the dog-eared manuscript by a complete unknown in India, fell for it instantly, and persuaded Hamish Hamilton to publish.

The authors of R. K. Narayan: The Early Years, have put the flesh on the bones of this story for the first time, providing copious detail about Narayan's struggle for recognition and, even more so, his battle to earn a living from writing. They make clear how bold Narayan was, in the face of much discouragement, to avoid taking a steady job and to stick to writing, whether it was novels, short stories, essays or journalistic hack work. A dilemma for serious writers anywhere, in the India of the time, this decision required absolute conviction. Though many members of Narayan's family were against his choice, it was only the support of an Indian "joint" family that allowed him to survive.

Narayan was also firm in his response to another dilemma. Should he write in English or in Tamil, the language of his immediate environment in Madras? Tamil literature has a long and distinguished tradition, and in the nationalistic 1930s it was undergoing a revival. Though Narayan is interested in Tamil and Sanskrit literature and is the author of two very readable English retellings of the Ramayana and Mahabharata, he has remained loyal to English in his writing, despite criticism from fellow writers using Indian languages.

Nowhere in the biography do we read of his own explanation for staying with English, but judging from the book's evidence, it would appear that he was shrewd enough to know that he needed to write in English if he was to make a living as a serious writer, and, as important, he was sufficiently in love with English literature to want to make his mark in it. As his younger brother Laxman, India's most celebrated political cartoonist, remarked to the authors concerning his childhood, the Narayan family would converse in English most of the time, and "while mistakes in Tamil or Kannada would be viewed lightheartedly, a grammatical lapse in English was 'frowned upon in no small way', the entire family rounding upon the offender".

The authors include many verbatim quotations from interviews with Narayan which give a good idea of his personality and all-important sense of humour. They are perhaps more sparing with quotations from his works. This is partly, no doubt, because they have no wish to take up space quoting books that are readily available, and also, I suspect, because the life-like flow and deceptive ordinariness of Narayan's style defy being chopped up into critical gobbets. The unique comic pathos in his writing for which his readers cherish him above all else has a definite tendency to evaporate in quotation.

Nevertheless, there are some delightful quotations, such as this acerbic one disinterred from Narayan's short-lived, wartime magazine Indian Thought (which he thinks should have been called "Indian Thoughtless"). It is from a light essay, entitled "The average man", and draws on his extensive experience of roguish editors, publishers and film producers. "This notion of the 'average' person has caused a deliberate cheapening and lowering of standards in all creative work. I have known a publisher who at one time produced first-class literature, later turning over rank rubbish by the ton on the plea that he was going to please the average person. I have heard a film director explaining away his costly rubbish with 'after all the man who really pays for the show is the average person'. I have known a director of a radio station spending months on a special programme and finally sending out on the air incoherent, inane noises, and answering all criticisms with, 'our average listener will like this immensely. You will see how many letters we receive appreciating this programme'.

It it is no accident that Narayan's first ever published piece, now lost, opened, he thinks, with the pithy words: "What is wrong with Indian films? Everything".

There are also extensive quotations from unpublished private papers in the book, in particular the chapters dealing with the devastating death of Narayan's young wife (a "girl from heaven", he told Greene) from typhoid in 1939, and the aftermath. Narayan took a strong interest in seances for the next year or so. Half a century later, he agreed to show the authors the "automatic" writing produced in these sessions, along with his comments, made at the time, on the accuracy or otherwise of what was written by the medium. Much of it was gibberish, but there were some amazing nuggets that helped to convince a sceptical Narayan that he had been communicating with his dead wife. Narayan's admired novel, The English Teacher, grew directly from those shattering and transforming experiences. The Rams give this intimate material its due importance, without sensationalism, while preserving a degree of detachment.

Overall, this biography is undoubtedly a valuable, pioneering work on a great writer. Its strengths are its thoroughness of research and its sympathy for its subject. Its weakness lies mainly in its literary style, which, despite some fine passages, is often plodding (especially in the recitation of the reviews of Narayan's work) and flabby, with some infelicitous English that would certainly grate on the ears of its subject. A good book, it would have been even better had it lost a quarter of its length, with the repetitions removed. The index is the most pitiful I have seen in a major biography; it fails to mention even Mahatma Gandhi. Nevertheless, I look forward to the next volume, and the second half of Narayan's life, with real anticipation.

Malgudi is Narayan's greatest invention wherein he could put in real people, real places in one harmony of day-to-day existence and eccentricity. Every minor and major character of Narayan's stories fascinates, even the only villain to figure in all his writings, Vasu, the man-eater of Malgudi. Narayan is that supreme alchemist who discovered that the ordinary is the most extra-ordinary aspect of civilised living. The navarasa of human life is not to be seen in cinematic exaggerations or in the blood and gore of modern novels or in the relentless efforts of peddlers of sex and obscenity in the print and audio-visual media, but in good, clean portrayal of life around you.

Rightly did Narayan discourage attempts at psychosocial analyses of his novels and characters. He saw life as it is and not as what it ought not to be. He took writing to a high level where his works could defy the application of critical literary yardsticks and standards. He was a superb storyteller and his style derived from the stories themselves rather than following any stereotype or archetypal fiction. You only see lovable characters, perhaps ludicrous and vain in some cases; and the narrative is smooth and gentle and the humor is totally unintrusive. From Swami and Chandran to The Guide and Nagaraj, Narayan created personae and places where the reader is involuntarily dragged into a living experience with those in print.

Behind all their unpretentious simplicity and ordinariness, Narayan's novels conveyed a sublime philosophy of life. Lives of ordinary people, like that of Swami, are "full of incident without accomplishment" but they are still full of happiness, elevating and instructive.

It is Narayan's literature that enabled me to understand the true import and meaning of a Zen parable about a priest who boasted to Master Bankei that his own Master "could hold a brush in his hand on one bank of the river, his attendant held up a paper on the other bank and the teacher wrote the Holy name of Amida in the paper through the air".

Bankei replied lightly: "That is not the manner of Zen. My miracle is that when I am hungry I eat and when I am thirsty I drink."

In the realm of Indian literature, Malgudi is like that Zen miracle. G.K. Chesterton said that Pickwick was but a sample of Dickens "like a piece of leather or a lump of coal. But the piece of leather blocked the street and the lump of coal set the Thames on fire''. Ditto for Malgudi. The spell cast by it on us will outlive us and the writer himself and also hold the future generations in thrall.

Unless you had an expert knowledge of the locality you would not reach the offices of The Banner. The Market Road was the life-line of Malgudi, but it had a tendency to take abrupt turns and disrupt itself into sidestreets, which wove a network of crazy lanes behind the façade of buildings on the main road.

Kabir Lane was one such; if you took an inadvertent turn off the Market Road you entered it, though you might not if you intended to reach it. And then it split itself further into a first lane, a second lane, and so on; if you kept turning left and right you were suddenly assailed by the groans of the treadle in the Truth Printing Works; and from its top floor a stove-enameled blue board shot out over the street bearing the sign "The Banner."

It was the home of truth and vision, though you might take time to accept the claim. You climbed a flight of wooden stairs (more a ladder), and its last rung was the threshold of The Banner. It was a good deal better than most garrets: you wouldn't knock your head on roof-tiles unless you hoisted yourself on a table; you could still see something of the sky through the northern window and hear the far-off rustle of the river, although the other three windows opened on the courtyards of tenement houses below. The owners of the tenements had obtained a permanent legal injunction that the three windows should not be opened in order that the dwellers below might have their privacy. There was a reference to this in the very first issue of The Banner. The editor said: "We don't think that the persons concerned need have gone to the trouble of going to a court for it, since no one would open these windows and volunteer to behold the spectacle below."

This stimulated a regular feature entitled "Open Window," which stood for the abolition of slums and congestion. It described the tenements, the pigsties constructed for human dwellings in the four corners of the town by rapacious landlords. It became an enemy of landlords. In fact, it constituted itself an enemy of a great many institutions and conditions. Within twelve pages of foolscap it attempted to set the world right.

From the garret of The Banner the world did not appear to be a common place. There always seemed to be some- thing drastic to be done about it. It had all the appearance of a structure, half raised—and the other half might either go up or not at all. "Some day," The Banner felt, "it must either go down or go up. It can't be left standing as it is indefinitely." There was a considerable amount of demolition to be done, and a new way to be indicated.

The possibilities of perfection seemed infinite, though mysterious, and yet there was a terrible kind of pig-headedness in people that prevented their going the right way. The Banner thus had twin work to do: on the one hand, attacking ruthlessly pig-headedness wherever found, and on the other prodding humanity into pursuing an ever-receding perfection. It was an immense task for anyone, with every conceivable equipment and support. It would be a tall order to give an editor. But in this case it worked because the editor had to take orders from only himself. And he felt that, after all, he had not made such a fool of himself as his well-wishers had feared, although the enterprise meant almost nothing to him financially.

In 1938, when the papers were full of anticipation of a world war, he wrote: "The Banner has nothing special to note about any war, past or future. It is only concerned with the war that is always going on—between man's inside and outside. Till the forces are equalised the struggle will always go on." Reading it over a couple of weeks later, Srinivas smiled to himself. There was a touch of comicality in that bombast. It struck him as an odd mixture of the sublime and the ridiculous. "There is a curse hanging over an editorial table, vitiating everything a man wishes to say. I can't say 'I want a cup of coffee' without appearing to be a slightly pompous donkey," he told himself. "I wish I could write all that stuff here," he reflected, lying on his mat at home. Going to an office, sitting up in a chair at the table—there was something wrong with the entire procedure. "I wish I could do all my writing here," he said to himself again and looked forlornly about him. The house was very quiet now because it was eleven at night and all the nerve-racked neighbors and their children were asleep.

There were four other families living in the same house. The owner of the house himself lived in a small room in Anderson Lane—an old widower who tried to earn the maximum money and spend less than ten rupees a month on himself. He had several sons and daughters, all of them in various prosperous activities all over the country, from the Himalayas down to the South.

He had a daughter in Malgudi, with whom he was not on speaking terms. He had led a happy family life in this house till the death of his wife, when the family scattered and disrupted. There after the old man, with the help of a carpenter, partitioned off the entire house, so that half a dozen families might be lodged in it, the screens and partitions creating an illusion that each unit was living in a home with privacy for food, sleep and washing.

It was said that he bathed at the street-tap and fed himself on cooked rice, which was distributed as charity in a nearby temple. He was known to have declared to everyone concerned: "The true Sanyasi has no need to live on anything more than the leavings of God." He made himself out to be an ascetic. He collected the rent on the second of each month, took away the entire amount and placed it in Sarayu Street post-office bank. It was said that he never paid any rent for his room in Anderson Lane. The story was that he had advanced a small loan to the owner of the house, which multiplied with interest and became an unrecognizable figure to the borrower in due course. When his wife died the old man moved in to occupy the room in his debtor's house at such a low rent that he could stay there for over twenty years working off the loan.

The very first time Srinivas met him he saw the old man bathing at a street-tap, while a circle of urchins and citizens of Anderson Lane stood around watching the scene. They were all waiting for the tap to be free. But the old man had usurped it and held his place. Srinivas felt attracted to him when he saw him spraying water on the crowd as an answer to their comments.

The crowd jeered: he abused it back; when they drew nearer he sprayed the water on them and kept them off, all the while going through his ablutions calmly. Srinivas asked someone in the crowd: "What is the matter?" Look at him, sir, this is the same story every day. So many of us wait here to fill our vessels, and he spends hours bathing there, performing all his prayers. Why should he come to the tap built for us poor people? We can't even touch it till he has done with it.

"Perhaps he has no other place." "No place!" a woman exclaimed. "He is a rich man with many houses and relations!" At the mention of houses, Srinivas pricked up his ears. He was desperately searching for a house: all his waking hours were spent on this task.

The old man came out of his bath dripping, clad only in a loin cloth. He told the crowd. "Now go and drain off all the water you like. I don't care." Srinivas felt it might be useful to ingratiate himself in his favor and asked: "Do you do this every day?" The old man looked at him and asked: "Who are you?"

"It is a profound question. What mortal can answer it?" "You are joking with me, are you?" the old man said, briskly moving off. Srinivas watched the wet old man going away angrily. It seemed to him, watching his back, that the chance of a lifetime was receding from him. An irresistible piece of jocularity was perhaps going to place a gulf between him and this man, who might have provided a solution to his housing problem. "Half a moment, please," he cried and ran after him. "I have an answer for you. At the moment I am a frantic house-hunter." The other halted; his face was changed. "Why didn't you say so? I will give you a house if you are prepared to abide by all the rules I mention. Make up your mind. I don't want to meet indeterminate souls."

> "What is your rent?" asked Srinivas. "Tell me what you will pay. I have one for seventy-five, one for thirty, fifty, ten, five, one. What is it you want?"
>
> "I will tell you presently. But perhaps you might first like to go home and dry yourself."

"Home! Home!" he laughed. "I have no home. Didn't I tell you that I am a Sanyasi, though I don't wear ocher robes? Come, come with me. I live in a small room which a friend has given me." He went through the lane, pulled out a thin key knotted to his sacred thread, turned it in the lock and opened the door of a small room. It was roofed with old cobweb-covered tiles, with a window, one foot square, opening at the top of the wall; there was another window opening on the road. He stooped in through the narrow doorway. Srinivas followed him.

"Sit down," said the old man. "You have to sit on the floor. I have not even a mat." Srinivas sat down, leaning against the wall. A few children from the main house came and stood by the doorway, looking in. The old man was spreading out his wet clothes on a cord tied across the wall. He opened a small wooden box and took out a dry dhoti and towel, a box containing ingredients for marking his forehead, and a rosary. He proceeded to decorate his forehead with a symbol, looking into a hand-mirror. The children stood in the doorway, blocking it. The old man turned from the mirror with a hiss. "Get away. What are you doing here? Do you think a fair is going on?" The children turned and ran away, shouting mischievously, "Grandfather is angry." Srinivas felt hurt by the old man's conduct. "Why are you hard upon those children?"

> "Because I don't want them. Children are a bane. I must tell this fellow not to let them loose on me." "They called you grandfather," Srinivas said.
>
> "They will call you uncle presently. How do you like it? I am only a tenant here. I hate all children. I have had enough trouble from my own children; I don't want any more from strangers. Are you in the habit of praying?"

Srinivas fumbled for a reply. "Not exactly——" "Well, I am. I am going to pray for about fifteen minutes. You will have to wait." Srinivas settled down. The other took out his beads, shut his eyes, his lips muttering. Srinivas watched him for a moment and felt bored. He sat looking out. Someone was passing in and out of the main house. Children were dashing to and fro. The old man said, without opening his eyes: "If you are a lover of children you have plenty to watch. All the children of the town seem to be concentrated in this street." After this he continued his silent prayers.

Srinivas reflected: "Who will know I am here, cooped up in a cell with a monstrous old man? If I ceased to breathe at this moment, no one would know what had happened to me. My wife and son and brother—". His thought went back to the home he had left behind. His elder brother could never understand what he was up to. "He has every right to think I am a fool," he reflected. "Man has no significance except as a wage-earner, as an economic unit, as a receptacle of responsibilities. But what can I do? I have a different notion of human beings. I have given their notions a fair trial." He thought of all those years when he had tried to fit in with one thing or another as others did, married like the rest, tried to balance the family budget and build up a bank balance.

Agriculture, apprenticeship in a bank, teaching, law—he gave everything a trial once, but with every passing month he felt the excruciating pain of losing time. The passage of time depressed him. The ruthlessness with which it flowed on a swift and continuous movement; his own feeling of letting it go helplessly, of engaging all his hours in a trivial round of actions, at home and outside. Every New Year's Day he felt depressed and unhappy. All around he felt there were signs that a vast inundation was moving onward, carrying the individual before it, and before knowing where one was, one would find oneself senile or in the grave, with so little understood or realised. He felt depressed at the sight of his son: it seemed as though it was an hour ago that he was born, but already he was in Second Form, mugging history and geography and dreaming of cricket scores.

"What exactly is it that you want to do?" his brother asked him one day. "The answer is late in coming, but you will get it," Srinivas replied, feeling rather awkward. The question of a career seemed to him as embarrassing as a physiological detail. His brother was the head of the family, an advocate with a middling practice—a life of constant struggle with rustic clients and magistrates in that small town Talapur, where he had slipped into his position after his father's death. His father had been an advocate in his time and had had a grand practice, acquired extensive property in the surrounding villages, and had become a very respectable citizen. The family tradition was that they should graduate at Malgudi in the Albert Mission College, spend two years in Madras for higher studies in the law, and then return each to his own room in their ancient sprawling house.

This suited Srinivas up to a point. But he always felt suffocated in the atmosphere of that small town. His wife had to put up with endless misery at home through his ways, and his little son looked ragged. They put up with his ways for a considerable time before shooting the question at him. He remembered the day clearly even now. He had settled down in his room with a copy of an Upanishad in his hand. As he grew absorbed in it he forgot his surroundings. He wouldn't demand anything more of life for a fortnight more, and then he observed his elder brother standing over him. He lowered the book, muttering "I didn't hear you come in. Finished your court?" And his brother asked: "What exactly is it that you wish to do in life?" Srinivas flushed for a moment, but regained his composure and answered: "Don't you see? There are ten principal Upanishads. I should like to complete the series. This is the third."

"You are past thirty-seven with a family of your own. Don't imagine I am not willing to look after them, but they will be far happier if you think of doing something for their sake. They must not feel they are unwanted by you. Don't think I wish to relieve myself of the responsibility." It was a fact: his elder brother looked after the entire family without making any distinction. "Such a question should not be fired at me again," he said to himself after his brother had left the room. He tried to get reabsorbed in the Upanishad he was reading. His mind echoed with the interview: perhaps something had been happening in the house. His mind wandered from one speculation to another; but he gathered it back to its task:

> "Knowing the self as without body among the embodied, the abiding among the transitory, great and all-pervading— —" said the text before him. On reading it, all his domestic worries and all these questions of prestige seemed ridiculously petty. "My children, my family, my responsibility—must guard my prestige and do my duties to my family—Who am I? This is a far more serious problem than any I have known before. It is a big problem and I have to face it. Till I know who I am, how can I know what I should do? However, some sort of answer should be ready before my brother questions me again—"

The solution appeared to him in a flash. He knew what he ought to do with himself. Within twenty-four hours he sat in the train for Malgudi, after sending away his wife and son to her parents' house in the village.

The old man came out of his prayer and said: "Would it be any use asking who you are?"

"I'm from Talapur and I am starting a paper here—"

"What for?" asked the man suspiciously.

"Just to make money," Srinivas replied with a deliberate cynicism which was lost on the old man. He looked pleased and relieved. "How much will it bring you?"

"Say about two thousand a month," Srinivas said and muttered under his breath: "Is this the only thing you understand?"

"Eh, what?"

"Come along, show me a house—"

They started out. The old man elaborately locked up his cell, and took him through a sub-lane to the back of Anderson Lane. As he came before a house he cried to someone who was driving a nail in the wall: "You! You! . . . Do you want to ruin my wall? I will give you notice to quit if you damage my house—.

6

R. K. Narayan's World of Imagination

Narayan captures the flow of Margayya's thoughts and thus makes the readers realise how intensely he reacts to a life of deprivation and how much he wants to rise above his circumstances. Narayan.s narrative technique also makes the reader aware of the real emotions Margayya goes through, as well as the mask that he puts on for the everyday world, thereby ensuring tolerance for his follies.

Similarly, there is another scene towards the end of the novel in which Narayan's narrative method takes us into the consciousness of Margayya's wife Meenakshi, when she is reacting to a quarrel between her husband and her son Balu. Here Narayan's narrator moves deftly in and out of the minds of his characters, testifying to the skill with which he manipulates narrative perspective and utilises the technique to further his thematic concerns.

In The Guide Narayan makes use of the dual narrative structure. The novel opens in the third person with Raju taking refuge in the neglected village temple where he meets Velan. In the first six chapters the point of view alternates between the third and the first person narration. The first person narration gives the reason for Raju.s lonely wanderings, and also about his past, while the third person narration is used to describe the present—how Velan mistakes him for a holy man and the subsequent events that lead to Raju's enforced fast. Chapter seven to eleven is in the first person narrative where Raju relates his story to Velan in order to show that he is not a holy man. The last chapter, narrated in the third person, portrays Raju.s enforced martyrdom. Nirmal Mukherji points out that the dual narrative structure and the consistently braided time scheme contributes towards a better and deeper understanding of the hero who is both a swindler and a holy man. By alternating the two time scheme at sharp intervals, Narayan has been able to bring into focus those aspects of Raju's character which are essential for the analysis of the inner confusion... Within these sections of Raju's confessions are embroidered the strands of the narrative which are related by the omniscient author. Narayan is, indeed, a careful craftsman who has devised narrative strategies adequate to his distinctive view of life. The above analysis shows that although Narayan's novels appear to be simple, he adopts complex narrative techniques and is capable of experimenting with narrative perspectives, time schemes, and different levels and voices of narration.

The above analysis shows Narayan as a traditional storyteller for whom stories come naturally and do not have to be shaped in any way. Narayan's narrator is often a detached and amused observer of events, whose emotional involvement with the story is minimum. His first and third person narrators show little variation among themselves and carry an unmistakable imprint of their creator.

Fakrul Alam observes that Narayan is a "conscious craftsman, a novelist who believes in the concept of appropriate form, a subtle manipulator of point of view, a writer whose devices can never be taken for granted, a master of the art of fiction".

Narayan belongs to the first generation of the Indian novelists writing in English. Of the three bigs the other two being Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand, Narayan alone enjoys a remarkably unique position as the Indian novelist. The uniqueness of Narayan, realised through his multi-faceted image, has created what may be called the aura of his imagination. The significance of the 'aura' may hardly be exaggerated, especially as one tries to approach the writer with a re-appraisal. Says Lionel Trilling: "Every established writer exists in the aura of his legend: the accumulated opinion one cannot help being aware of, the image of his personality that has been derived, correctly or incorrectly, from what he has written."

The first striking thing about Narayan's legendary aura may be spelt with the writer's almost religiously taken up penmanship as the sole and life-time profession: The hazards of the writer, determined to live by his pen alone, can hardly be exaggerated, but for Narayan there seemed to have been absolutely no choice. As a matter of fact, his father did initiate Narayan into the teaching profession but, lacking the patience and the discipline indispensable for that kind of vocation, the son decided to "simply write novels ... and live off the joint-family system." (Mehta, 164) It is only when one compares the paltry sum of nine rupees and twelve annas Narayan had earned for his first story (1986:103) with the fabulous royalty of $ 5000 he is offered for a short story by the New Yorker (Sanghvi, 1984:51), that one realises the success story of his survival as a writer. The past fifty fruitful years of his penmanship underline a rare example of the writer's most assiduously followed profession.

As one considers Narayan's use of the English language as one of the salient features of the story of his aura, one realises that his choice of the language of his creative writing seemed to have been as decisive as the choice of his profession. Futile as it seems to enter into the perennial debate-whether the Indian writer should write in English it may be noted that Narayan has always tried "to convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own." (Rao, 1938) And Narayan was well aware of the role he was playing as an Indian English writer stetee:

> We are not experimentalists ... we are not attempting to write Anglo-Saxon English. The English language

> through sheer resilience and mobility, is now undergoing a process of Indianisation .... I am able to confirm ... that it has served my purpose admirably, of conveying unambiguously the thoughts and acts of a set of personalities, who flourish in a small town located in a corner of South India.

The case could not have been stated in a better way. Suffice it to say that Narayan's English, although lacking the poetic resonance and the gusto of imaginative prose, remains plain and simple and yet effective enough to transmute the sensibilities of his people.

The highly striking element contributing greatly to the writer's multi-coloured image is spelt with the immortal letters: MALGUDI. Narayan himself narrated the genesis of the ficticious locale to Ved Mehta thus:

> I remember waking up with the name Malgudi on Vijayadasmi ... I sat down and wrote the first sentence about my town: 'The train had just arrived at Malgudi Station,' (Mehta, 56)

Like the creators of the Yoknapatawpha County and the Wessex Territory respectively, Narayan has cast Malgudi as a permanent backdrop to his fictional world and has remained confined to the well-defined boundaries of the imaginary town. There have been a number of attempts to identify Malgudi on the map of India and some scholars Naik for instance have even presented Malgudi maps in their books on Narayan. (1983:152) Narayan's Malgudi uniquely combines the pastoral simplicity of an Indian village with the ever changing modernity of a city.

Ever since Narayan had written Swami and Friends, he has been painting the Malgudi saga, novel after novel, strictly centring round the middle-class milieu. One cannot help musing over the fact that Narayan seems to be enjoying a writer's prerogative to select his material to the maximum. As for the novelist's middle-class milieu, William Walsh, focussing on the basics and the essentials of the class, says:

> Narayan's pre-occupation is with the middle class, a relatively small part of an agricultural civilisation, and the most conscious and anxious part of population. Its members are neither too well off ... nor too indigent. ... They may take their religion more easily than the passionately credulous poor .... It is the members of the middle class who are psychologically more active, and in whom consciousness is more vivid and harrowing, that Narayan chooses his heroes-modest, unself-confident heroes, it is true.

An analysis of the middle-class milieu may further reveal that Narayan locates it in the South India. Having a first-hand acquaintance with his people and knowing their mental make-up as closely as the skin of his palm, Narayan seems to have determined to focus on that class alone and never to shift his lense to other human territories. One may note the characteristic middle-class traits so authentically mirrored in Narayan's novels:

- An average and ordinary individual engaged in the common and unflattering pursuit of life.
- His tendency to opt for the security and his instinct to escape or postpone the challenges of time.
- His inclination to rebel but the final preference for acceptance and withdrawal.
- His passive nature suited for the life of non-doing and non-action.
- His remarkable sensitivity and high sense of religiosity.
- His cowardliness and his tendency to indulge in fantasizing life's minor issues.

The most significant feature of Narayan's aura, with which the writer has often been identified, is the noncommittal stance. It is particularly here that Narayan stands out in the company of his fellow novelists, Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao, because, as against the writer of Untouchable, who is primarily known for his social concerns, and that of The Serpent and the Rope known for his metaphysical preoccupations, Narayan alone seems to have refused to jump on the bandwagon of an ideology or an ism. The only commitment, which he has been following with a religious zeal, is the writer's commitment to his art. As far back as in 1953, Narayan had clearly voiced his views regarding the role of an Indian English writer in the context of the Indian novel. In the special Atlantic Monthly Supplement on India, Narayan pointed out that the subject matter of fiction during the nationalist movement, "became inescapably political ... the mood of the comedy, the sensitivity to atmosphere, the probing of psychological problem factors, the crisis in the individual soul and its resolution, and above all the detached observation, which constitute the stuff of fiction, were forced into background".

If the non-committal stance prompted Narayan to stress the Objectivity as the crux of (comic) fiction, it has also impelled him to remark that the issues, particularly like the social reforms could never be dealt with through a novel. He said:

> In dealing with social evils, one might employ a poem, a play, a novel or an essay as the medium. In my view the least satisfactory form for this purpose is the novel. A novel's form and structure are too diffuse to carry through successfully a message, or sustain it.

The aura of Narayan's imagination has one more influential shaft to contribute. It is the novelist's moral attitude. It may, perhaps, read like a paradox for the proverbially non-committal writer. The paradox, however, gets dispelled, as soon as one realises that unlike a theologian or a moralist, Narayan has unobtrusively and imperceptibly merged his moral attitude with the themes of his novel. Although Narayan does not seem to overtly profess the ethical issues, his moral consciousness seems to linger like a shadow of the novel. The entire fabric of the human drama is woven under the moral care of the writer, as it were.

The moral attitude, though expressed through different devices like the idealised roles of the mother and the wife in the Hindu family, has been prominently dramatised through the man-woman relationship in Narayan's novels. Time and again, Narayan has expressed his restlessness, at times even aversion at the depiction of open sex in literature. Significantly, the novelist seems to have been preoccupied with it since the beginning of his career as a writer. This is what he says in his memoir: "I had on hand about twenty short stories written mainly to see if other subjects than love ... could be written about. I wished to attack the tyranny of love and see if life could offer other values than the inevitable man-woman relationship to the writer."

True, Narayan has certainly depicted a few rather bold and embarrassingly un Narayanesque man-woman relationships. Here, the characters seem to indulge in the kind of sexual relationship which, in Narayan's India, may never be endorsed by social or cultural codes. And it has repeatedly been seen that such deviating men and, especially, women ultimately meet their fated end, a sort of doomed, frustrating or miserably lonely existence.

Equally unique and significant is Narayan's image as the presenter of India. Although Narayan casts his novels against a specified period of time-right from the Raj days to the present time-the unmistakable feel that he always gives is that of the eternity or timelessness embodied in the eternal spirit of India evoked through the river Sarayu, realised as Malgudi's Ganga. India, despite her diversified culture, innumerable castes and creeds, social hierarchies and economic inequalities, has come to be generally regarded as the symbol of unity. Such a belief may not be shared by everyone; none, however, would disagree with the fact that India has always presented herself as the most enigmatic country. In the context of Narayan's presentment of India in his novels, the 'Indian reality' focussed in the works of a few noted writers may offer cross references and in the final analysis Narayan's Indian experience may be considered with a right perspective.

Raja Rao has superbly evoked the spirit of place located in the Indian village through his sthala purana, Kanthapura and has extensively dealt with the metaphysical India, focussing on the transcendental and advait philosophy in The Serpent and the Rope. Mulk Raj Anand, however, determinedly fixed his lense to focus on the socio-economic injustice-ridden and caste-and-creed-dominated society. In his Untouchable and Coolie, for instance, Anand vividly presents the agony of the underdog who suffered primarily at the hands of the privileged class. Bhabani Bhattacharya too presents, in He Who Rides a Tiger and So Many Hungers, the gloomy spectacle of the have nots, smitten by the ugliest inequality and deadliest hunger. India's 'Scholar Extra-ordinary' Nirad C. Chaudhuri takes up the most exhaustive study, a sort of ethnological survey, of the peoples in India in his The Continent of Circe. Imbibing controversial spirit and alienist's attitude, Naipaul projects India as An Area of Darkness. The title of Naipaul's book is too eloquent to need any comment. Thus, one may go on ad infinitum telescoping the images of India in the books of several writers. Suffice it to say that India, the Orient Sphinx, has always remained the most enigmatic and paradoxical subcontinent.

As for Narayan's India one may feel its presence as one feels the atmosphere. The Indian experience in the Malgudi novels is chiefly expressed through the collective mind, which in fact, is the Hindu consciousness. The family frame with its characteristic web of relationships always serves as a stage for the projection of the traditional ethos. Most of the protagonists seem to be Hindu Brahmins. Horoscope figures as a deciding factor in the match-making. Finally the people in Narayan's India seem to believe in the preordained universe, Karma consequence and rebirth.

The oral tradition is the vitally significant factor in Narayan's writings. Although he does not consciously write about it like the author of Kanthapura, Narayan speaks of it in the preface to Gods, Demons and Others. In the course of narrating the tale of the story-teller (pandit), Narayan underlines some of the elements of the art of story-telling, which, incidentally, constitutes the crux of the oral tradition. The basic element of the tradition, points out Narayan, is its oral nature. The narrative substance at some point of time seems to have descended to us mostly by word of mouth at first, and later, it was recorded. The narrative, with its perennial human interest and vitality, is told again and over again. Most of the tales have certain common elements: the sages meditate mostly in the forests and the asuras, embodying the evil principle, dig in some way their own grave. Since the stories run on the ethical principles they have a moral at the end. Most importantly digressions with lots of interludes would continue for days together.

Narayan seems to present himself as a copy-book example of the story-teller. The overall structure of his novel unmistakably shows his adherence to the oral tradition in its content and form. The pattern of his themes seems to have moral undertones, although subtle and unobtrusive, and the novels have an easily noticeable episodic (and circular) structure. The novelist seems to be so much obsessed by the sprit of oral tradition that he seems to have cast himself in the character of Nambi in the story, Under the Banyan Tree.

The recurring thematic pattern underlining illusion versus reality in the Narayan novels with their implicit but unmistakably felt moral overtones may impel one to consider the novelist as a fabulist. In fact Narayan shows a close kinship with the fable-writers. It is pertinent to consider Salman Rushdie's comment on Wilham Golding's statement that the fabulist is didactic and inculcates moral codes: "He's right about the Fable-Aesop's Fables or the Panchatantra-where the machinery of the tale is designed inexorably to reach that moral statement which the story is seen to have proved. It carries with it the dreadful warning against not behaving in the moral way the fable recommends." If asked to comment on Narayan's novels, Rushdie would not have said anything different. In fact, the parabolic tone and the mythological souls of most of his novels, in the final analysis, seem to acquire fabulistic dimensions. A close reading of Narayan s novels reveals that the novelist has invariably employed the thematic parallels from the rich and inexhaustible storehouse of Indian mythologies, legends and the puranas. It is in this context that Narayan's A Tiger for Malgudi stands out. The story of tiger with a soul and spiritual awakening is narrated on the structural pattern of the Panchatantra. Thus, as one takes into account the total corpus of Narayan s novels, one may state that the fabulistic form of narrative seems to be most suited to the novelist's moral attitude and his adherence to the oral tradition. It is not suprising that Narayan's novels are regarded as the 'religious fables.'

Despite the moral overtone in and the fabulistic structure of his novels, Narayan escapes from being branded as a conscious moralist. The saving grace is none other than the novelist's employment of the comic wit and the ironic point of view. The bifocal perception so artfully and subtly merges with the moral tone in Narayan's novels that it is difficult to consider the one without the other.

Realizing the inherently paradoxical and ambivalent nature of life, Narayan seems to have been left with no choice but to capture and focus on the theatre of the absurd through his irony. Muecke points out that Friedrich Schlegel had come to believe that irony was the "recognition of the fact that the world in its essence is paradoxical and that an ambivalent attitude alone can grasp its contradictory totally." As one considers Narayan's novels in their entirety, one realises that irony for him becomes a strategy to underline the predicament of the common man caught in the illusory web of life and his characteristic struggle to extricate from it. M.K. Naik, analyzing the developmental stages of Narayan's irony, points out that it begins as the simple technique of creating a mild shock out of sudden deflation of anticipation, it matures into a strategy to focus on the predicament of the protagonist bogged down in the illusory world in his later novels and, finally, it emerges as the novelist's vision underlining the overall human existence in his masterpieces. If the basic absurdities of life prompt Narayan to treat human existence ironically, the inherent incongruities and inconsistencies of life seem to impel the novelist to view the human spectacle through the comic filter. Like the employment of irony, comedy too for Narayan becomes the strategy to focus on the ordinary man's characteristic journey from the illusion of disorderliness to the reality of orderliness, because "Comedy at once distorts and clarifies, and even distorts in order to clarify the human situation."

Narayan's comedy has generally been regarded as gentle in nature, having an edifying purpose. More importantly, it has also been tolerant and sympathetic towards human foibles and frailties. It is not known for emitting harsh and loud laughter but often creates ripples in the mind and has an ineviteble ring of pathos. Significantly, it is characterised, by its complete isolation from the sentimental tone. It is here that Narayan seems to have imbibed the true spirit of comedy. Bergson observes: "absence of feelings ... usually accompanies laughter. ... Indifference is its natural environment, for laughter has no greater foe than emotion ... highly emotional soul, in tune and unison with life, in whom every event would be sentimentally prolonged and reechoed would neither know nor understand laughter."

Narayan's realisation of comedy is directly linked with the delineation of his characters. Narayan's characters seem to remain undeveloped not merely because he lacks the psychological plumbing but more importantly because it is the inherent nature of comedy that they remain so.

Northrop Frye puts the case so aptly: "The society emerging at the conclusion of comedy represents, by contrast, a kind of moral norm, or pragmatically free society. Its ideals are seldom defined or formulated.... we are simply given to understand that the newly married couple will live happily ever after ... will get along in a relatively unhumorous and clear-sighted manner. That is one reason why the successful hero is so often left undeveloped: his real life begins at the end of the play."

Thus, the foregoing analysis of Narayan's kaleiodoscopic Images, convincingly emerging out of his creation and culminating into formidable aura of his imagination, may impel one to regard him as a legendary figure. Significantly, if this aura asserts the strength of the novelist, it may equally pose problems both for the winter and his-critics, the former may obviously prefer to remain under the "halo," and the latter, influenced by the aura, may possibly hesitate to assess the writer objectively. And this takes us to Narayan criticism.

Narayan and the Procustrean Bed of Criticism

It may seem obvious that as one tries to look at Narayan through a critical prism, one is quite likely to recall the injunction given by the American humorist in the context of The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn: "Persons attempting to find a motive in this narration will be persecuted: persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished, persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot dead."

Time and again Narayan has expressed his genuine desire to be left alone. In fact quite often he has shown displeasure with the over-enthusiastic researchers who keep on (labelling and boxing) the writer. And yet, ironically, Narayan often finds himself stretched on the Procustrean bed of criticism. It may, however, be added that by and large the novelist has enjoyed more and suffered less at the hands of the critics.

K.R.S. Iyengar thinks that Narayan is quite "content like Jane Austen, with his little bit of ivory just so many inches high." Despite this limitedness, he opines, Narayan has universal appeal because, "Malgudi is everywhere." lyengar also seems to be the first to regard Malgudi as the real 'hero' of Narayan's ... novels," the implication being, the spirit of place has the dynamism to control and shape the destiny of its characters.

C.D. Narasimhaiah regards Narayan as the product of Hindu middle class whose sensibility and consciousness he not only shares but also sympathises with. He also points out that Narayan has an eye for the comic in life around him and he telescopes the oddity in ordinary men who possess the marked potentialities for the uncommon and who seem to be caught in the struggle toward maturity "within the accepted religious and social framework."

M.K Naik, having already offered significant perspectives on Narayan's novels, in his recent book critically analyses the developmental stages of the novelist's employment of irony. More importantly, he points out that Narayan's primary preoccupation is "with man's fulfilling the life-roles entrusted to him by tradition and environment."

Meenakshi Mukherjee pinpoints Narayan's treatment of the rebellion, and comments that the novelist has the belief in Nature's inherent scheme to balance the unruly and disorderly world and to restore peace and order: "Narayan sees any sudden change not for what it produces, for what new possibilities it brings into existence ... but much more negatively as a play of shadows, an illusion, an unreality like a bubble, which will burst open sooner or later, and the normal order of the cosmos will prevail again."

Mukherjee also contrasts the stability and vitality of Narayan's traditionally static society (in the Malgudi novels) with the static but decadent society depicted at the beginning of Anantha Murthy's Sansakara and underlines the dynamism of the "static" world in Narayan's novels.

Uma Parameswaran regards Malgudi as the only round character, other characters being one dimensional and flat because Narayan lacks the plumbing of the depth. Observing that both Narayan and his work underline unpretentiousness, she thinks that the positive vision expressed through his novels, "perhaps, is Narayan's contribution to modern fiction."

Rajeev Taranath, making a precise evaluation of the novelist, observes that it is certainly possible to locate Narayan's creative genius in his 'creative use of the ordinary.' He also notes the cyclic pattern as the protagonist in Narayan's novel journeys "from average to extraordinary and back again to a more poignant state of average."

K.V.S. Murti tries to trace the spiritual development of the common and average protagonist in Narayan's novels. If the average protagonist in Narayan begins as a monkeyish character, wrapped up in the illusory air of distractions in life, confronting the absurdities and incongruities around him, he ultimately comes out as a chastened person, and the spiritual realisation turns him a Hanuman character:

> "Narayan's bifocal vision comprises the 'ludicrous' and the 'ideal' ... while earthly monkey is ludicrous, mythical Hanuman is ideal."

G.S. Amur tries to perceive Narayan from the Indian perspective. He points out that since Narayan is deeply rooted in his own culture the Hindu culture, his characters have all along been controlled by the values and ideals originating in his own culture. Insisting that Narayan needs to be approached from the Indian perspective, Amur notes the cultural influences in Narayan: "The important of these concepts are purusharthas (Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha) and ashramadharma (Brahmacharya, Grahasthya, Vanprastha and Sanyasa), concepts unique to Hindu culture and Hindu way of life."

William Walsh tries to delve into the psyche of Narayan's characters and considers that their entire life style has been imperceptibly controlled by the Indian ethos. As the most characteristic trait of the Malgudians, Walsh notes: "even the seedy, the stupid and vain, retain what Lawrence called a peculiar, nuclear innocence."

Edwin Gerow tries to identify the literary roots of Narayan and puts forth a theory that Narayan's "art expresses a genuine formal as well as contextual continuity with the best efforts of Indian literature generally, which, as elsewhere in the world, achieved their typical formulation in a 'classical' period. Narayan's is a classical art."

A. N. Kaul presenting a kind of insider's point of view, comments on the typically Narayanesque domestic comedy which seems to have been shaped under the puritanic care of the creator: "The centre of life, as in the case of other comic writers, is of course domestic life. And how severely Narayan maintains his position.... Romantic or passionate love has no place in it. Any deviation from it, any impulse or act that denies its centrality is a prime aberration in Narayan."

John Updike, reviewing Narayan's My Days, notes, among other things, 'his delightful gifts of caricature.' The most significant comment of the American novelist, however, seems to be this: "Narayan is one of the vanishing breed-the writer as citisen .... But of writers immersed in their materials and able to draw tales from a community of neighbours, Faulkner was our last great example."

Berry Margaret observes that Narayan's novels have a crystal clear reflection of the Indian metaphysical conception of the world as 'Lila.' She also points out that the novelist seems to be totally influenced by the philosophy of the transcendenlal Absolute: for Narayan, "the real world is the Eternal Static World of Absolute Being." It is in this context that his role as a writer assumes greater significance. Says she:

> "Literature, too, like life, is a lila, another level on which the shadows play ... the novelist is thus certainly not a reformer. He is a story-teller, a raconteur, repeating the work of the god."

Bhalchandra Nemade, in his most scathing article against Indian Writing in English predicts "that the present day blossoming of Indian Writing in English is a swan-song." As for Narayan, Nemade asserts that the novelist lacks "the native rhythm of Indian life" and that in The Guide, Narayan misrepresents the "India we know."

V.S. Naipaul, possibly the most controversial of Narayan critics, may also be regarded as the most dissenting voice in Narayan criticism. Regarding Narayan's novel as such and the depiction of India in his novel, Naipaul has this to say: "The India of Narayan's novel is not the India the visitor sees. He tells the Indian truth. Too much that is overwhelming has been left out: too much has been taken for granted. There is a contradiction in Narayan's form, which implies concern and his attitude, which denies it." And later, modifying his earlier stance about Narayan's novels, Naipaul states: "Narayan's novels are less the purely social comedies I had once taken them to be than religious fables, and intensely Hindu."

T.D. Brunton regards Narayan's work as unpretentious and untheoretical and, (recalling Naipaul) states that Narayan "runs the opposite danger of having no commitment whatever. This is dangerous vacuum for a writer of such a socially involved form as the novel." He makes a comment, not acceptable to everyone, regarding Narayan's use of fantasy. He says: "His typical art is an original compound of fantasy and realism. But when ... the vein of fantasy predominates, his writing slips into escapism and triviality."

The list of the Narayan critics may indeed be extended ad infinitum. Considered in its entirety, the criticism offers a wider perspective and a comprehensive view of Narayan's world, underlining several salient characteristics of his writing. Taken individually too, these critical opinions seem to focus on the valuable features of Narayan's craft of fiction. These views serve as excellent pointers underlining characterisation, themes, modes (comic, ironic) of writing, world-view, in fact almost all the elements of Narayan's novel.

A closer look at the Narayan criticism may reveal that the commentators generally seem to form two distinct groups which may conveniently be called the Positivists and the Negativists. Thus, the Positivists seem to be extolling the novelist's deceptive simplicity in terms of his language, his concern for the epic of the ordinary, his two- inch ivory tower and its miniature world miraculously acquiring representativeness, his therapeutic comedy, subtle irony and gentle satire and finally, his artful treatment of the essentially ambivalent nature of life underlining the predicament of human existence. The Negativists as the name suggests seem to find fault with Narayan's handling of the novel form, implying the novelist's lack of social concern, his essentially flat characters suggestive of the novelist's inability to delve deep into the psyche of his characters and dealing only with the surface realities and thus remaining oblivious of the bitter actualities of life around and finally, his failure to evoke any kind of poetic or emotional response through his 'pedestrian' language.

It may be said that if the formidable aura of his 'legend' is likely to baffle the Narayan reader; the vast criticism with its contradictory overtones may leave him puzzled. Consequently the essential Narayan has always been an eluding figure. In fact, out of an uneasy awareness of the reader's puzzlement and an urge to perceive the novelist with the essentials, though synoptically, the present study is conceived. In fact, behind the study there have been a number of issues, the most teasing one being the employment of the most popular, and possibly the only, term, flat, to describe the Narayan characters, particularly the protagonists and, Narayan's microscopic and absolutely insulated world of Malgudi realised chiefly through the middle-class milieu. The present study intends to show the inadequacy of the Forsterean term to deal with the typically Narayanesque characters and underline reasons accounting for the writer's self-imposed confinement. But since the entire approach is character-oriented, it may be essential to get ourselves acquainted with the notion of character in the novel. We may as well consider Narayan's concept of character in the context of his novel, before the thesis in the present study is properly spelt out.

Character in the Novel

E.M. Forster as a critic of novel is primarily known for his division of characters into flat and round. Although Forster's terms have a wider acceptance among the critics, they do not seem to have total approval. Forster defines his terms thus: The round character is the one that is capable of surprising the reader. The one incapable of surprising, developed round a single idea and, which may be summarised in a single sentence is a flat character. About the flat character Forster says: "For we must admit that flat people are not in themselves as big achievements as round ones, and also that they are best when they are comic. A serious or tragic flat character is apt to be a bore."

Edwin Muir discussing the novel of character remarks that the characters in this type of novel are known for their unchangeability and completeness from the beginning itself. He then argues in defence of the unchanging characters whom Forster calls flat, and points out 'a method in their flatness.' Muir argues thus: "Why indeed, should not a character be flat? The only answer to this is that the present taste in criticism prefers round character. The taste of the next generation may prefer flat, for all we know."

Suggesting that it is the incorrigibility and changelessness of the flat characters that constitute the stuff reality is made of, Mary McCarthy underlines the story of the flat characters, making the most significant, although rather controversial, comment: "The principle of growth in human being is as real, of course, (though possibly not so common) as the principle of eternity or inertia represented by the comic."

W.J. Harvey covers a wide range of characters and groups them into different categories underlining their nature and purpose in the novel. According to him the most important are the protagonists "who conflict and change as the story progresses." The characters at the other end are known as the background characters. These characters, recalling Hardy's rustics, represent the 'voices of the community rather than individualised traits.' These characters are given a moment's intensity, and generally have anonymous existence. The category of character that falls between these two is known as ficelle. A ficelle, certainly more individualised than the background character, serves a specific function in the novel. The last on Harvey's list is the Card about whom he says:

> "The distinguishing feature of the Card is his relative changelessness, combined with a peculiar kind of freedom ... he is like a child's toy, its base is filled with lead, which always bobs upright no matter how far he is pushed over."

Henkle Roger considers the understanding of people, and by implication, the characterisation, as the centrality of the fictional experience. To him the essential factors in the characterisation reflecting the basic human elements "are the complexity of the characterisation, the attention given to certain figures, and the personal intensity that the character seems to transmit." He also observes that the secondary characters serve the primary purpose of populating the novel, provide the human context, and time and space are realised through them.

Scholes and Kellog, like Edwin Muir, seem to defend the flat character and stress that both the types-the round and flat-have equally significant existence. Their view is: "To suggest that one order of characterisation is better than another is folly. To realise that differences exist is the beginning of wisdom." Referring to the characterisation in Hebraic and Hellenic literature, Scholes and Kellog remark that the opaqueness of such characters should not be taken as their limitation or defect but simply as a characteristic. Considering the types as a part of some large framework, they point out that the types as such are always referable to the most general sort of idea, for instance, "Everyman as a type of general humanity."

Defending the flat characters Liddel thinks that as in drama, their significance in fiction is inestimable and that "every successful comic character is 'flat: For when a comic character begins to put on three dimensionality, to abandon his stock phrase and to say something else .. . we are generally displeased." He also points out that it is quite likely for the writer to see his self projected in his own work.

The list of the 'characteristics' may still be extended. The critical views, taken in their entirety, offer valuable pointers in the present study as they seem to consider the flat characters from a much wider perspective .. In fact, they underline the definition, the nature and the scope of the so-called flat character. Finding them greatly relevant in the context of the Narayan characters, these views may be referred to throughout the present study. W.J. Harvey's framework, in particular, may remain a constant point of reference. But, as the study intends to suggest a traditional framework conceived with an Indian perspective these foreign parameters may remain inadequate to measure the typical Narayan characters fully. And it is here that one may think it essential to understand Narayan's concept of human character especially because it has a pervasive influence upon the entire corpus of the writer's fiction and also because it occupies the centripetal position in Narayan's novel.

Narayan and Character

Narayan may be regarded as a rare case of a practising novelist whose ideas, personal convictions and beliefs related to the overall scheme of life have an unmistakable stamp on his creative art. As regards Narayan's notion of (human) character, The World of the Story-Teller; Narayan's preface to Gods, Demons and Others, reflects it fully, being the only major source. Narayan has underlined certain salient features of the epical-narration: These 'features may certainly serve as useful pointers and devices to understand Narayan's notion of character. They are:

- The characters as prototypes and moulds.
- The human race cast in the moulds having permanent existence.
- Personality remaining unchanged.
- Goodness triumphing and prevailing over evil.
- No death at the end and no tragedy in the Greek sense.
- Belief in the miraculous power of Nature, the Supreme agent establishing the ultimate peace and order.
- Faith in rebirth and reincarnation.

To these pointers one may also add a few equally significant elements of the Story Teller's World: The human action in this context is realised on an enormous time and space scale which often goes beyond the human reckoning. Karma consciousness is a deeply ingrained factor of the cultural ethos: the law of Karma is believed to determine the nature of human action passing through a series of births. The universe has been realised through a cyclic structure. It passes through four periods yugas and is ultimately followed by a delusion, Pralaya. Thereafter the universe is recreated and it passes through the cyclic pattern all over again.

These guiding principles taken in their entirety may indeed be regarded as the 'Commandments' in the context of Narayan's creative world. They may even seem to control the novelist's modus operandi shaping the delineation of characters in his novels. What is now to be seen is whether these principies completely mingle with the writer's creative process and become the indivisible part of his creative world or they appear like overtly conceived message and thus mar the craft of Narayan's novel. And this brings us to the intended study itself.

A Typological Approach

Having already had a fairly good background of the writer and his mind and the overall nature of his creative process mainly in the context of his novels, we may now introduce the intended study, spelling out its essentials, the operative framework and the modus operandi. In other words, what may immediately be focussed is the why, the what and the how of the typological approach to the study of the characters in Narayan's novels.

If the general critical consensus agrees in acknowledging Narayan as a remarkable comic-ironist and as a gifted caricaturist, it also registers a vivid note of dissent on account of his unchanging, ungrowing and undeveloped characters, particularly the protagonists in his novels. Forster's term flat seems to have become a stick for many to beat Narayan's characters with. In short, many of his critics argue that since the novelist fails to delve deeply into the minds of his protagonists, he seems to be incapable of creating round characters, and consequently remains a surface delineator of characters.

In all fairness to Forster, it may be admitted that his labels, flat and round have a wider acceptance and a great relevance in the context of 'character criticism.' Likewise, the Forsterean yardsticks may be useful to a certain extent in the case of Narayan's characters and serve as a point of reference. Dealing with Narayan's characters in their entirety, however, the terms become inadequate. There seem to be some discrepancies in Forster's use of his labels. In fact Edwin Muir points out that Forster does injustice "by claiming certain flat characters as round." Muir goes on to assert that Becky Sharp 'never surprises us enough to pose as a round character." But besides the discrepancies in Forster his terms may serve an extremely limited purpose as one deals with the Narayanesque protagonists who present a peculiar case. It may indeed be essential to briefly note the characteristic features of the protagonists in Narayan's novels and underline the nature of their unchanging character.

There has always been a general critical consensus that the protagonists in Narayan novels do not show any perceptible development. Putting it differently, they do not seem to be growing and thus remain unchanged to all appearances. The term unchanged is loaded with several implications. Basically, Narayan's characters have been realised through the cultural ethos and they essentially belong to the preordainedly conceived world of their creator. The karma-conscious characters seem to be accepting their lot, in life and, thus, finally remain changeless.

When it comes to rebellion-a sure ground to develop and grow from it is observed that the rebellious tendencies though expressed as natural human instincts and traits of diversified nature, are regarded as cultural deviations in Narayan. Significantly, the rebels never seem to lead a satisfying life. In fact, as the rebels ultimately withdraw from their rebellion and return to the common world of acceptance, they seem to, almost invariably, head towards a peaceful and contented life. Since rebellion is regarded as deviation from the tradition and acceptance through withdrawal is taken as the sane and desirable attitude, the rebels seem to remain unchanged at the end.

The story of the unchanging and undeveloping protagonist in Narayan has another cultural dimension. Albert Camus observes that the Hindus do not face the problem of revolt because for them "tradition is sacrosanct." What is implied in Camus's comment is that the individual, totally nourished in the sacrosanct society not only remains aware of the myths of his cultural world but also finds himself greatly influenced by them. As for the Narayan protagonist (man or woman), the myths have an indivisible part of his/her cultural ethos. Thus the Rama myth, the Sita myth, the Satyavan-Savitri myth and a number of well-known myths epitomizing the values and the ideals seem to influence the lives of the Narayan characters, particularly in the context of their rebellion which, as already suggested, is interpreted as cultural aberration. It is here that the rebel ultimately accepts the mythic injunction and finds himself unchanging.

And most importantly, the reason accounting for the undeveloping characters in Narayan's novels is concealed in the nature of comedy itself. It is the very nature of the comic characters that they do not change. Their incorrigibility and undeveloped life are taken as their personality traits. Mary McCarthy has gone to the extent of stating that "the principle of growth in human being is as real ... as the principle of eternity or inertia represented by the comic."

But, if the growth in Narayan's characters, especially in the protagonists, is precluded on the material plane of existence, there has always been another opening to grow and even to develop their consciousness. The protagonist, during his/her characteristically struggleful life, passing more often through the blind alley of illusory world, finally seems to attain some kind of spiritual realisation or revelation. This spiritual awakening itself, in the typically Narayanesque world, may indeed be interpreted as the growth or the development of the protagonist. This imperceptibly subtle growth of consciousness may not be measured by the Forsterean terms. Thus, out of the basic realisation that Forsterean labels remain inadequate to measure Narayan's characteristically traditional characters and the urgency felt for a possible approach to adequately realise them that the typological study was first conceived.

After Forster, many other critics were also referred to as the present approach was being shaped. Interestingly enough, some of them proved immensely useful for the Narayan characters as they defended and even advocated the role of flat characters. Scholes, Kellog and Liddel argued in favour of the flat characters and emphasised their importance in the novel. Other critics offered several valuable pointers in the context of 'character study.' Of all the critics, W.J. Harvey proved to be extremely useful with his critical framework covering a wide range of characters.

Harvey's Cards may in fact be the closest to the types Narayan depicts in his novels. Harvey does not consider them as totally immune from change and growth as Mary McCarthy does and underlines the distinguishing feature of the Cards as their "relative Changelessness combined with a peculiar kind of freedom." So also Harvey's ficelle, though playing minor roles with their characteristically functional values, serve excellently to deal with Narayan's one-liners, mostly the eccentrics. But when it came to consider the absolutely traditionally realised characters in Narayan's novels, the alien parameters would only describe them and not reveal their essentials. Thus, although the present approach may always refer to the western labels, particularly Harvey's, they too were considered inadequate in dealing with Narayan characters in their entirety.

The obvious choice in terms of character-criticism (for Narayan) should have been the existing Narayan criticism. Needless to say, the massive Narayan criticism, although rather far-fetched and controversial at times, has been able to offer a wide variety of perspectives focussing on the salient features of the Narayan novel. The critics, both Indian and Western, seem to have considered every possible aspect of the Narayan novel. As already seen, the Narayan critics have extensively dealt with the structural patterns, the character delineation, the (recurring) thematic patterns, the modes of writing, the milieu and several other elements in Narayan's novels. Individually, they offer valuable insights and useful pointers, especially in the context of Narayan's 'character-delineation.'

But again, their disparate sort of criticism remains inadequate to deal with the Narayan characters in their entirety. What in fact was being looked for was a kind of three-tier framework which would take care of (a) almost all the characters in Narayan and present .them through their essentially traditional trappings, (b) underline the different modes used by the novelist to reveal their roles and, (c) telescope the world view of the novelist realised through the thematic development and character delineation in his novels. And so eventually, the present typological approach materialised.

It may be stressed that the intended approach was primarily conceived with a view that if tradition breathing novelist like Narayan is approached with the foreign parameters, he may not be properly understood with the essentials of his creative world. In other words, it was seriously thought that an Indian novelist, underlining the Indian sensibility in its widest sense of the meaning, necessarily required, for a close up as it were, the culturally conceived framework. The other important consideration contributing to the conception of the present typological study was its character-oriented approach. Narayan's novels are novels of character and, significantly enough, the novelist has always tried to explore the human existence with its elemental issues through the central consciousness in his novels. His insistence on character portrayal assumes great importance in this context. Says Narayan: "My focus is all on character. If his personality comes alive, the rest is easy for me." Finally, the character-oriented approach may also be taken as a device to focus on Narayan's delineation of characters and underline the features related to his characterisation.

It may be essential to briefly explain the central term in the title of this study, namely typology, before it is properly spelt out in some details. The term type as a character (or personality) trait has been widely used in the context of character criticism, in Drama and Novel. Forster, as already pointed out, has considered the types in the context of the flat characters. Narayan seems to have plenty of such types as they exemplify Forster's definition: "they remain in his [reader's] mind as unalterable for the same reason that they were not changed by circumstances; they moved through circumstances." Ben Jonson elaborates the nature of the types in his theory of the humours. The term humour has been associated with Ben Jonson's satirical portrayal of the characters in his comedies. This is an old medical term applied to each of the four fluids in the body "choler, melancholy, phlegm, and blood" the prompting of which was supposed to determine man's constitution and his temperament. The excess of any of the humours gave to the temperament a peculiar bias reflected in man's actions. Ben Jonson defines or rather illustrates it thus:

> And when some peculiar quality.
> Doth so possesse a man, that it doth draw,
> All his affects, its spirits, and his powers,
> In their confluctions, all to runne one way,
> This may be truly said to be a humour.

The types, chiefly affected by humours, have been found jostling about in the lanes of Malgudi. They are commonly known as the eccentrics in Narayan's novels.

One may also recall the types dealt with by Scholes and Kellog. The critics underline the most characteristic and equally common trait of the types as "the most general sort of idea, as Everyman is a type of general humanity." They also point out different types: the religious, the psychological, the intellectual et al. Many of Narayan's types may have a close kinship with these and even Northrop Frye's "the alazons or imposters, the eirons or self-deprecators, the buffoons (bomolchoi) and the agroikos (churl)" seem to have their distant relations in Narayan's novels.

These types, despite their obvious kinship with Narayan's, may remain inadequate to cover the large number of types in the Malgudi novels. The proposed framework is to accommodate almost the entire humanity of Malgudi. Narayan's novels, taken in their entirety have nearly every conceivable face in the world. The entire Malgudi comes alive with its infants, school boys, young lovers, householders, sanyasis, poets, teachers, advocates, doctors, printers, editors, vendors, moneylenders, taxi-drivers, drunkards, lunatics, seducers and prostitutes. And even an elephant named Kumar and a tiger named Raja have their meaningful existence here. The typology is designed in such a way as to accommodate almost every soul according to his/her own characteristic role. The characters are divided into four distinct types: innocent, rebel, eccentric and sanyasi. They are basically realised through their traditional trappings. The typology, therefore, bears a sort of indigenous stamp.

At the outset the typological approach may pose the basic problem emerging out of the so-called 'compartmental' nature of the study. Needless to say, human characters are rarely realised through a single trait of their personality. It is, however, the prerogative of the writer to telescope and illumine a single dominant trait of a character: " Thus, the characters with such dominant traits may naturally be fitted into the typological frames. Accordingly, in Narayan the basic typecasts with their strikingly single and identifiable trait may certainly occupy the individual family frames with natural ease. The full-fledged characters, however, may be seen passing through more than one frame of the typology. The only possible and probable explanation for this may be offered in the words of Shakespeare "one man in his time plays many parts."

The typological study may be considered as a valid approach to the study of the Narayan characters who have been traditionally realised. The Narayanesque conception of the characters, taken in their entirety, naturally lends to the typological families, each of which may have fully qualified types underlining individual traits. It may be essential to briefly note the modus operandi of the typological approach to get the synoptic view of the entire project.

To begin with, the head word of each typological section will be defined underlining different shades of connotation and the individual types will be analysed accordingly. For instance, under the typology of innocence the children are considered for their basic (childlike) innocence, the rustics for their naivete and the old people for their second childhood. The characters will primarily have three-tier projection: they will be considered for their (a) thematic roles (the teacher, the poet), (b) for their typological roles (the rebel, the eccentric) and (c) the structural or the function roles (the ficelle, the Card). Besides these roles, the characters may be considered for their ironic, comic, satirical, symbolic and mythical projection.

The typology intends to note the strategies used by the writer to focus on the basics of his world projected suggestively through different human appearances. Thus, innocence may be primarily regarded as the untainted world of the child or grown-ups necessarily imbibing the childlike state of mind; rebellion may be taken as the projection of the distorting world of illusion; eccentricity may be understood as the reflection of the inherent absurdities and incongruities in life and sanyasa may be interpreted as the ideal state of human existence. Certain recurring themes emerging commonly from all the typologies and reflecting the writer's world-view may also be noted. Thus, themes like illusion versus reality, tradition and modernity, the return of the native and, the dynamics of the average may be underlined.

Every section of the typology may also underline the deceptively used strategy called the rite de passage by the writer to suggest the (spiritual) realisation or the growth of the protagonist. This may also be taken as Narayan's way of showing the characteristically realised development of his flat characters. The types in Narayan's novels may be compared with their prototypes in the works of other writers of the world particularly with a view to focussing on the Narayanesque notion of human character. Thus the child characters in Swami and Friends may be contrasted with Golding's Lord of the Flies and Marco, the cold-blooded cuckold in The Guide, may be cast against Casaubon in George Eliot's Middlemarch.

Finally, the typological study intends to present the Narayan characters in the chronological order of their appearances and to consider the following twelve novels of Narayan: Swami and Friends (1935), The Bachelor of Arts (1937), The Dark Room (1938), The English Teacher (1945), Mr. Sampath (1949), The Financial Expert (1952), Waiting for the Mahatma (1955), The Guide (1958), The Man Eater of Malgudi (1961), The Vendor of Sweets (1967), The Painter of Signs (1976), and A Tiger for Malgudi (1983). Talkative Man (1986), ('too long for a short story and too short for a novel'), The World of Nagaraj (1990), and Grandmother's Tale (1993) appeared in its serialised form, have not been considered in the present study. In fact, the typological wheel turns a full circle with A Tiger for Malgudi.

7

Eccentrics in Narayan's Malgudi Novels

In popular usage, eccentricity refers to unusual or odd behavior on the part of an individual. This behavior would typically be perceived as unusual or unnecessary, without being demonstrably maladaptive. Eccentricity is contrasted with "normal" behavior, the nearly universal means by which individuals in society solve given problems and pursue certain priorities in everyday life. People who consistently display benignly eccentric behavior are labeled as "eccentrics".

The Oxford English Dictionary defining the term Eccentricity as 'the state or quality of being eccentric' offers the following shades of meaning:

- The quality of being abnormally centred; of not being concentric; of not having the axis in the centre.
- The condition of not being centrally situated, distance from centre.
- Of a curve; Deviation from the circular form.
- The quality or habit of deviating from what is usual or regular; irregularity; oddity; whimsicality.

Considering Narayan's notion of eccentricity, the *OED* frame of meanings may certainly serve as a point of reference. At the outset eccentricity, either as a streak or as a full-fledged nature, in the cortex of Narayan's characters, underlines the Oddity or whimsicality in human nature. However, a close reading of the Narayan novels reveals that eccentricity seems to be the novelist's strategy to focus on life's basic inconsistencies.

At the outset the typology of eccentricity makes one aware of the rather alarming number of the eccentrics in Narayan's novels. In fact, Narayan himself seems to think "that more eccentric people live here than elsewhere." One may even say that every third character in Malgudi novels seems to be an eccentric. Naturally, the eccentrics seem to have largely contributed to populate Narayan's novels, and seem to be increasing with every new novel of his. One cannot help being aware of their jostling and clamouring presence. They appear in diversified appearances and display divergent personality traits. One may also note that the eccentric character, in Narayan, may appear as a mere dot or a mere line or a full-fledged study. The typology intends to deal with them in the order of their entries on the Malgudi stage.

The Financial Teacher

Ebenezar, reminiscent of the Biblical namesake, seems to be the first eccentric in the Malgudi novels. He appears as Swami's scripture teacher at the Albert Mission school in *Swami and Friends*. Ebenezar's streak of eccentricity is chiefly dramatised through his fanatical attitude. The scripture, teacher seems to have been literally lifted from Narayan's 'school-days' life. In *My Days* Narayan says: "The teachers were all converts, and, towards the few non-Christian students like me, they displayed a lot of hatred .... The Scripture classes were mostly devoted to attacking and lampooning the Hindu gods, and violent abuses were heaped on idol-worshippers as a prelude to glorifying Jesus." Ebenezar in *Swami and Friends* seems to be repeating the attitude of Narayan's teacher in his extolling the virtues of Jesus Christ and denouncing the Hindu Gods in general and Shri Krishna in particular. Narayan presents the scene with Ebenezar's obvious theatricality thus:

> "Oh, wretched idiots!" the teacher said, clenching his fists, "why do you worship dirty, lifeless wooden idols

> and stone images? ... Now see our Lord Jesus. He could cure the sick, relieve the poor, and take us to Heaven." Tears rolled down Ebenezar's cheeks when he pictured Jesus before him. Next moment his face became purple with rage as he thought of Sri Krishna.

It is evident that Ebenezar's inflammable denouncing of the Hindu Gods turns into a delightful comicality as it is realised in the innocent world of Swaminathan. In fact it is Swaminathan who turns the episode into an anti-climax by retorting the teacher that if Jesus was so great why he was crucified and asking, if "he was a God, why did he eat flesh and fish and drink wine?" Ebenezar is a one liner and a one-dimensional pencil sketch. However, installing the eccentrics in Narayan's future novels, he remains one of the memorable caricatures.

As we consider Narayan's first eccentric, we may note certain pace-setting elements in *Swami and Friends*, especially in the context of the typology of eccentricity in Narayan's novels. The streak of eccentricity seems to be projected through the magnifying glass of exaggeration. The eccentric is realised through the comic filter. One may discern the detached delineation of the caricature. And finally, one may also note Narayan's flair for the meaningful names. Ebenezar, for instance, strikes an easy contrast to and juxtaposed with the young hero Swaminathan, a character fully realised as a Hindu boy.

The Local Bacchus and Other Odd Characters

Kailas, in *The Bachelor of Arts*, installs Alphonse *in A Tiger for Malgudi*, as a drunken eccentric. He too seems to be the pick from the novelist's life: Narayan tells us: "My uncle himself was an inescapable model for me ... especially his abandon to alcohol in every form all through the day." (I portrayed him as Kailas, in *The Bachelor of Arts.)* Disregarding the genesis of the drunkard, one may say that Narayan seems to have presented Kailas through the generalised psychology of a stock character. However, he has been endowed with a few endearing traits and idiosyncratic features and he plays an enlivening role. As a caricature, Kailas may certainly be regarded as an unmistakable development in Narayan's delineation of eccentric caricatures.

Narayan vividly underlines the characteristic traits of Kailas as he tells Chandran his epicurean philosophy. A man must spend forty years in making money and forty years in spending, as he grows lo-quacious and remembers his (departed) mother and yet resolves to visit the prostitute and, as he boasts of his extraordinary ability to remember his own name, do any multiplication or addition, and to repeat the numbers from a hundred backwards after "fifteen pegs of neat whisky."

Although Kailas is realised as a two-liner caricature, his role has several implications. Basically, Kailas plays a clown to bring comic relief against the gloomy world of Chandran, the dejected lover. More importantly, he, as has been already pointed out, precipitates a crisis of conscience in Chandran by showing him the ugliest faces of realities: a horrible drunkard-himself-and a prostitute. Knowing Narayan's flair for meaningful names, one may read the novelist's ironic intentions reflected in Kailas: his name and his association with alcohol, recalls the image of the God Shiva, but unlike the latter's ability to restore the balance and order of the turbulent universe, Kailas is realised merely as a local Bacchus. Kailas may also be taken as the psychological projection of Chandran's imbalanced mind. In the final analysis, Kailas, unlike the eccentric in *Swami and Friends*, plays a thematically related role of a catalyst enforcing Chandran to play the role of a take sanyasi.

Besides Kailas, *The Bachelor of Arts* has four characters displaying streaks of eccentricity. Gajapathi, the Asst. Professor of English, correcting everybody's English and asserting that even Fouler has serious English errors, is often caught repeating: "Heads down and pencils busy, gentlemen, listen to me with your pencils gentlemen." A lover of his own voice and an advocate of the new historical approach in the country, Prof. Raghavachar, insists on having "a, clarified, purified Indian History." A revolutionary and an anti-imperialist friend of Chandran, Veeraswami, besides his fantastic theory of *Cure Hunger* by encouraging people to use coconuts and fruits of cactus for food, determines to start a movement called the *Resurrection Brigade* to gain India's freedom and appeals everyone to be its members including "poets, philosophers, musicians, sculptors, and swordsmen." The last of the eccentrics is the poet called Mohan. Since as a poet he "doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven," he, versifies on a wide variety of subjects from 'a Roadside Grass-seller to the Planet in its Orbit: from Lines suggested by an Ant to the Dying Musician.'

It may be suggested that the eccentricity telescoped in the caricatures of the teachers, though creates ripples of laughter, it seems to be the writer's strategy to satirise the undesirable notion and practice of education introduced shrewdly by the English and followed meekly by the Indians. It may be pointed out that the novelist's dissatisfaction over the colonial system of education, though playfully and indirectly introduced under the guise of eccentricity in *The Bachelor of Arts*, finds a serious treatment in *The English Teacher.* As for the eccentricity projected through Chandran's friends, it may also be taken as the symbolic reflection of the hero's illusory notions of reality.

The Whimsical Double-Dealer

Narayan, seems to be fully convinced to accept the life as a whole. Accordingly, he treats his characters with a balanced view. Putting it differently, he does not believe in painting his human portraits either in full dark-even Vasu, the metaphor of evil shows some human elements-or in full white-Gandhi however, seems to be the only exception. If his good characters are not totally free from the vices, the bad ones too, although subtly, display an element of commendable trait. For, Narayan believes in the possibility of even seeing the transformation of demons into Gods under certain conditions. Keeping this in view, one may consider the eccentric Ramani in *The Dark Room*.

Undeniably, the eccentricity in Ramani irrupts in the context and at the cost of Savitri. Ramani's whims and idiosyncrasies seem to have become the part and parcel of Savitri's consciousness. One may, for instance, note the whimsicality of Ramani reflected in his hooting of his car horn thus:

> Ramani as a rule sounded his horn about a furlong from his gate, two hoots which were meant to tell the household, "Ranga, keep the door open...." While to Savitri it said, "It is your business to see that Ranga does his work properly...." Some days the hooting would be less emphatic, and Savitri's ears were sufficiently attuned to the nuances and she could tell a few minutes in advance what temper her husband was in.

It may be noted that there seems to be a decidedly progressive employment of eccentricity in *The Dark Room*. It does not come here merely as a mirth creator. The horn hooting of the car has two meaningful realisations during the course of the novel. At the beginning, if it reflects Ramani's whimsicality, it also comments on Savitri's slavish condition. At the end of the novel, however, Savitri checks herself consciously against her instinctively expressed response to it and almost defiantly says, "what if?" (207) The inwardly transformed attitude of Savitri towards her tyrant husband, though (almost) monosyllabically expressed, vividly notes the growth of her consciousness. The eccentricity, thus, is thematically linked up and serves to underline the development of the flat character of Savitri.

One also recalls an instance, clearly underlining Ramani's whim as he takes Savitri to a movie. Wishing to monopolise Savitri all for him-self, he does not allow any of the three children to accompany the parents and to the daughter persisting to be taken along with them, the father explodes with: "If I hear you squeal, I will thrash you, remember. Be a good girl." (26) As for Savitri, Ramani says, "I will count sixty. You must dress and come out before that." (26)

If the eccentric streak denotes the tyrant's whim, it also connotes the husband's desire to enjoy the beautiful company of his spouse all for himself. He was proud of his fair wife and swelled with pride if he found people turning back to notice the charming lady. At the theatre he be-came the epitome of love and consideration. It is the streak which brings to the surface the concealed human element in the otherwise in-human Ramani. In the final analysis Raman's eccentricity may also be viewed symbolically as it focuses on Raman's "Excentric" role in the context of his affair with Shanta Bai. Significantly enough as the so-called centre falls out, the mother plays it and saves the things from falling apart.

The Queer Physician and the Strange Headmaster

The first eccentric worth the name is Dr. Shankar of Medical Hall, in *The English Teacher.* To Krishnan he is not merely the family doctor but also "the greatest physician on Earth." Narayan introduces him with the usual touch of comicality: "He looked like a film star being mobbed by admirers. He waved his hand, smiled, and gently pressed all his admirers back to their seats."

Listening to Susila's symptoms (given orally by her husband) the doctor prescribes the medicine, dispelling the doubts of the bewildered teacher saying: "Oh, it is just Malaria. I have fifty cases like this on hand, no need to see her." And strangely enough, when the earlier diagnosis goes wrong and the second says typhoid, the doctor, feeling least guilty about it, says: "I like typhoid .... It is the one fever which goes strictly by its own conviction and rules ... typhoid is the king among fevers ... It is an aristocrat who observes the rules of the game. I d rather trust a cobra than a green snake." Later, he frequents Krishnan's house and familiarly moves about. He even plays with the teacher's daughter Leela and gives her a ride on his shoulder. When he is confronted with the Swami, playing a sort of spiritual healer for Susila, Dr. Shankar merely smiles and says to the agnostic teacher. Don't belittle these people.... There is a lot in him too, we don't know. When we understand it fully, I am sure we doctors will be able to give more complete cure."

It may be pointed out that although Dr. Shankar's eccentricity basically underlines the oddity and idiosyncrasy in his character, it may also be viewed symbolically. Viewed thus, the eccentricity, particularly realised through his detached and aloof attitude to Susila's sickness, may be regarded as the symbolic projection of Krishnan's future attitude to Susila's death. In fact, Krishnan too displays a vivid streak of eccentricity as he is caught composing a poem, "The Great Kailas," as Susila lay on her death-bed. But concealed beneath the eccentricity of the teacher seems to be the projection of the *Sthitaprajna.*

Dr., Krishnan's playing with Leela may look unbecoming for his profession. But beneath the insane behaviour seems to be concealed his spiritual maturity of understanding the world of innocence. In the final analysis the eccentric doctor's comic role, with his absolute detached attitude, may in fact exemplify the nature of the comic pointed out by Henery Bergson as he says: "The absence of feelings ... usually accompanies laughter ... indifference is its natural environment." And the eccentric may also underline Narayan's concept of tragedy with an unmistakable ring of comedy.

The headmaster in *The English Teacher* has a distinct identity as an eccentric. He, as a headmaster, seems to have a double in real life as Narayan talks about the one in his memoir, *My Days:* "I never knew what his name was: one never thinks that a headmaster could have any other name. He is introduced as Leela's teacher happily engrossed in his experimental school for children, called meaningfully, *Leave*

Them Alone. Despite his own children, the headmaster was ironically destined to shape and look after other people, thanks mainly to his termagent wife. He exemplifies a life of ironies and paradoxes. He servies the astrologer's predicted death and despite the pleadings and entreaties of the members of his family, resolves to renounce the household for good and devote to *Leave Them Alone*.

As an eccentric character he rings authentic. For instance, while taking Krishnan to his house when his children tell him that their mother was not at home, the father says: "Excellent." Or, when Krishnan was surprised to see him reading a critical book on Beaumont and Fletcher, "The dullest work," the headmaster reveals the mystery by saying: "If I open a book like this and allow my eyes to rest on the lines, it helps me to do a lot of private thinking. I read very few books for any other purpose." Or, when he tells Krishnan that he never uses a towel at the bath room because he enjoys "a whole sale drying.

Narayan makes his symbolic intentions clear by giving the eccentric no name. Read in this sense, the headmaster plays Krishnan's alter-ego. He may also be regarded as a catalyst as he opens a window on the innocent world of children for Krishnan. Significantly, he seems, in a way like the eccentric Dr. Shankar, to be related to Krishnan through the death motif. Symbolically, if the headmaster services his own death, the English teacher survives that of his wife's. Ironically however, if the English teacher succeeds on communicating with his wife, even after her death, the headmaster, despite his living wife, is destined to have no communication with her.

In the final analysis, although the two-liner eccentric creates subdued laughter, he reflects the inevitable sadness in human life under-lined in Narayan's notion of comedy. Hazlitt s words appear quite meaningful in this context as he says: "We cannot suppress the smile on the lip: but the tear should also stand ready to start from the eye.

The Lunatic Lover Mr. Sampath

The Printer of Malgudi keeping with R.Ks novels has a very simple storyline. And as ever, R.K elevates the novel with his captivating characterisation and scintillating story telling, not to forget his deft diction. There are a few business relations that demand two persons to work very closely that it may easily turn into an intimate bonding of hearts. A doctor and nurse, director and actor, opening batsmen in a cricket team, and so is that between an editor and a printer. To bring out the journal of Malgudi "The Banner", Mr.Shrinivas, The Editor and Mr. Sampath, the Printer have to work together. The two entirely contrasting good hearted characters forge a great partnership that makes "The Banner" the cynosure of all eyes in Malgudi. However a situation arises that they have to temporarily discontinue the journal.

Not two persons to lay idle, both of them join hands with a film making company where they have to trace varying paths, with their special bond still very deep. A love affair with the actress of the movie makes life difficult for the daring and over ambitious Sampath, while the ethnic and ethical Shrinivas has his problems of over responsibility too. Some sour incidents in the studio force Shrinivas to quit the studio and revive his banner with another printer, a thing that doesn't seem to bother Sampath caught entirely in the charm of the heroine. But Sampath comes back after the loss of the lady, loss of his family, loss of his wealth, loss of fame and loss of peace. The story ends in a gripping manner when he confides with his good old friend Shrinivas. And as you expect from R.K novel, you are only let out with a very heavy heart.

At the outset, the eccentric Ravi in *Mr. Sampath,* is realised as an artist turned lover, turned lunatic. With him, the novelist seems to have completed the portrayals of "the lunatic, the lover and the poet. He is also realised more as a symbolic character than as an individualised one. Initially he plays the bank clerk, unwittingly loses the job, thanks mainly to his general manager "that compound of beef and whisky," sees a beautiful woman like a vision but before he immortalises her on his canvas she vanishes. Much later, he takes Shanti for his lost Beatrice and, as Sampath, playing God Shiva, tries to embrace Shanti, playing Parvati, Ravi rushes to the stage, knocks the rival down and tries to kiss and carry his sweetheart. Ultimately he finds himself exorcised and sent to Salem for cure.

Ravi's eccentricity, especially as he turns a lunatic, can hardly be exaggerated. But playing an artist, or an obsessive lover, or a lunatic he, however, comes out flimsily and lacks authentic touches. The artist is mostly shown with a single sketch of his beauty. As a lover he makes an extremely poor and pathetic figure and his lunacy is also summarily dealt with. It is here that Ravi may be taken as a symbolic character.

In the context of Ravi's mad degree of love, Chandran *(The Bachelor of Arts)* looks more sensible as he restores the temporarily lost balance of mind. What seems to be concealed beneath Ravi's obsessive and airy love for the visionary beauty is in fact his illusory conception of love and his deviation from the ordinary (and therefore sane) way of life. Ravi's father, reluctant to see his son employed at Sampath's film studio underlines his concern for the ordinary man's life thus: "Then he had better try and do something else .... There must be dozens of ways making a living without becoming a performing monkey."

Ravi may also be taken as a symbolic projection of Srinivas's mind. Srinivas, who as a sane middle-class householder, advises Ravi, "Like Shiva open your third eye and burn up Love," ironically finds him drawn to the same beauty: "He saw before him a very pretty girl ... a perfect figure ... everything that should send a man, especially an artist, into hysterics. Srinivas ... felt her enchantment growing upon her."

Symbolically again, Ravi's role of a lunatic or a psychopath assumes importance in the context of the (entire) attitude and philosophy of Srinivas (and by implication of Narayan). Despite his willingness to stop the inhuman beatings of the exorcist and save his friend Ravi, and in fact stop the whole mad act, Srinivas checks himself because the recently seen 'Pisgah' vision makes him realise the futility of his action. It is here that Ravi becomes the medium to project Srinivas's philosophy of non-action and quietism. In the end Ravi, already showing signs of sub-dued emotions, is led to the holy place of faith, a temple at Salem. In his heading towards the temple-from the mad and a false world of illusory love is suggested the restoring of the average and ordinary life freed from illusions and distortions. Thus, ironically enough, Narayan seems to make use of Ravi's madness to reflect Srinivas's sanity and wisdom.

V.L.G. in *Mr. Sampath,* although a dot of a character, plays an important functional role. Basically, he is realised as the most popular stage and film actor and is known to have played the only role of Lord Shiva all his life. Absurdly enough, the reason for his sticking to the only role was not so much for its challenging possibilities but because V.L.G. happened to be a great devotee of Shiva. Says the religious actor: "I do no other role. I'm a devotee of Shiva. Both in work and in leisure I want to contemplate Shiva." Narayan describes the eccentric in these words: "V.L.G. took out of his pocket a small casket, out of it he fished a piece of tobacco and put it in his mouth, and then proceeded to smear a bit of lime on the back of a betel leaf, and stuffed it also into his mouth. He chewed with an air of satisfaction.

It may be noted that Narayan seems to juxtapose the ridiculous V. L. G with the sublime image of Lord Shiva. Apparently, V. L. G.'s tobacco chewing act deflates the reader's anticipation for the Great Shiva. In fact, the initials, V. L.G. have an unmistakable ring of trivial modernity in the context of the spiritually evoked name of Lord Shiva. Finally, it is in keeping with the Juxtaposing technique that V. L.G. (as Shiva) descends from the Kailas because, Sampath refuses to pay him five thousand rupees for the extra acting, and is obliged to quit the scene unceremoniously.

Significantly enough, a one-liner eccentric also seems to be playing a functional role. It is because of his exit from the stage that Sampath plays Shiva and the whole film flops. One may also read an ironic suggestion in Lord Shiva's role: V. L.G. and Sampath, though play the God Shiva instead of realised as the 'chaos controlling agent' they end up as the Lords of misrule. In the final analysis, it may be noted that Narayan's employment of eccentrictly, realised essentially in one or two liners, seems to be an ironic or symbolic device to underline the thematic implications.

The Madras Crank

As one passes from one novel to another (in its chronological sequence) one notices Narayan's progressive development in the portrayal of his eccentrics. If they remain essentially comic and grotesque caricatures they also underline thematic relevance. The Madras Crank in The Financial Expert may be regarded as an exemplary in this context. When the bereaved sire Margayya (receiving the news of the death of his prodigal son, Balu) goes to Madras, a chance acquaintance takes him to the eccentric, known as the Madras Crank who turns out to be a wealthy owner of a theatre. This is how the Crank introduces himself:

> I am not God but only God's agent. He ordered, "Go and prepare the world for my coming." That I am doing... I write every day to every King, Ruler, Viceroy President and Minister, in the world, that their boss is soon arriving.... Every day I write to President Roosevelt, Stalin, and Churchill, particularly.

Significantly, the one liner crank, besides playing a wonderful specimen of eccentricity, serves other symbolic functions as well. It is in this sense that he seems to be related to the other equally wealthy eccentric, Margayya, and, underlines thematic relevance. The supposed death of Balu, conveyed by the Madras Crank, may be viewed as the loss of the filial relationship of the man with Midas touch. It is the death that virtually turns the exasperated father blind towards his already pampered son as he encourages him to lead the more indulgent life and ultimately gets him married. Balu's death obliquely comments on the next door people, as the glimpse of the joint-family relationship in (Narayan's) India. It also underlines a characteristic Indian experience as Balu's mother expresses her excessive grief over the demise of her son.

In the final analysis, the Madras Crank may be regarded as one of Narayan's delightful caricatures realised through his singular eccentricity. It may certainly be relevant to note Freud's views in this regard: "As is known, caricature brings about the degradation by rendering prominently one feature, comic in itself, from the entire picture ... a feature which would be overlooked if viewed with the entire picture. Only by isolating this feature can the comic effect be obtained which spreads in our memory over the whole picture."

The Jail Bully

As one considers Waiting for the Mahatma one cannot help thinking that if intended, Narayan the ironist par excellence, could certainly have painted Mahatma Gandhi as the Eccentric Extraordinary. Possibly for the personal reverence for Gandhi, the novelist must have cast him differently. Moreover, the novel, although grows under the shadow of the Mahatma, it is certainly not his story. One may therefore consider the other eccentrics, merely the one liners, in Waiting for the Mahatma.

When Sriram was in detention at the Central Jail, he was confronted with the self-styled leader, a bully, imprisoned on the charge of house-breaking and murder. The idiosyncratic trait of the bully was his whim to sing a hymn, a bhajan "Rama Rama, Sita Rama" and to threateningly insist everyone to join him. When Sriram was released from the jail, the bully's parting words to him were: "When I am released I will break into your house some night, and teach you good sense. I don't like selfish fellows like you."

The jail bully and the eccentric Ramu (at the Solur village) who climbed the tree-top with a lantern, causing untold anxiety to his mother Shouting, "if you are going to quarrel, I'll jump down and make you all scream," have obviously no thematic relevance and seem, therefore, primarily to people the novel.

The Cold-blooded Cuckold

The odd-man Marco in The Guide is the only eccentric cuckold in Narayan's novels. Like many of his eccentric counterparts, Marco too is a centrally related character. Despite his being cuckold, or perhaps, because of it, Marco virtually shapes and controls the other major characters in the novel. Uniquely, even after his exit from the scene of action, Marco, especially for Rosie, still remains on the stage as, what may be called, a bright absentee. It may be significant to focus on the most characteristic element of his life, oddity, as it seems to have become the guiding principle of his life.

Marco a shortened version of Marcopolo the great traveller, is the name given by Raju, as the former appears to him in his first encounter with the eccentric. It is pertinent to mention it because Marco gave Raju the impression of being a "space-traveller," striking a definite contrast to all the earth-bound tourists. In fact, from the first appearance to his final exit, Marco's entire span of life is realised through glaring oddities.

Despite the essentially modern and liberal sprit reflected in his "matrimonial advertisement," Marco's first encounter with Rosie must have given her the distorted image of the man who seemed to be interested in and concerned with things rather than (living) human beings. Says Rosie to Raju: "we met, he examined me and my certificate, we went to a registrar and got married." If Marco unreservedly exhibits his eccentricity, his oddity seems to have created a discordant note in the bride Rosie's mind. It may be significant to stress that the odd man preferred to peep into the degree certificate (probably to verity its validity) rather than peeping into the mind of the life-long companion. He in fact considered marriage as the social symbol of status and prestige. In this context Marco may recall the Duke in Browning's "My Last Duchess" without of course, the latter's horrifyingly inhuman trait.

Marco is mostly realised 'as a scholar engrossed in his research. He seems to have been destined to live all alone. What is important to note is his preference for loneliness over human company which C.D. Narasimhaiah attributes to Marco's obsessive research. He says: "Long preoccupation with walls and stones has made a stone of himself and the stone is in the midst of him." It is no wonder then if he feels excited and thrilled in the company of stone-walls, and grows grim and ominously quiet in the company of human beings. Raju puts his oddity thus: "Dead and decaying things seemed to unloosen his tongue and fire his imagination, rather than things that lived and moved and swung their limbs." Although this certainly is the lover viewing the rival, one cannot miss the basic oddity in Marco's nature and the biting irony that despite Rosie also being an artist, Marco not only totally disregarded her art but also regarded it as "street acrobatics."

Marco's odd and cold relation with his wife and his abnormal passion for the research among the ruins may be attributed to the lack of virility in him. Although Narayan is known for his reticence in the scenes of passion, he is certainly not silent in The Guide. When Rosie, for instance, confides in Raju, she talks about Marco not being a "real and live husband." She seems to have suggested enough to underline what's what. Says Raju: "I looked up at her to divine her meaning, but she lowered her eyes, I would only guess." Possibly, Narayan does not feel comfortable or consider it necessary to bare the facts. One is tempted to quote. George Eliot as she, suggestively though, makes Casaubon's case pretty clear in Middlemarch: "Having made up his mind ... to adorn his life with the graces of female companionship ... he determined to abandon himself to the stream of feelings, and perhaps was surprised to find what an exceedingly shallow rill it was." Significantly, Marco and Casaubon share amazing similarities between themselves: both of them are engrossed in their intellectual pursuit: Marco in his "Cultural History of South" and Casaubon in "Key to All. Mythologies" (though the latter couldn't complete it). Both give the impression of "Winter marrying Spring," underline total disregard of their wives and emerge as villain figures. And finally, both share the element of drying of passion. Marco, however, does not make a ruthlessly callous husband as Casaubon.

Marco's cuckoldry has many implications. Basically, it underlines the odd man's mental make up. In fact his morbid interest in his research and the total neglect of his wife may be taken as one of the causes of his cuckoldry. Had he shown a wee bit of human consideration, a little love and a little affection to Rosie, the Karma conscious Indian wife, would never have stooped to folly. Marco's straightforward and plain nature may also be considered responsible for the fall. He seemed to have taken his wife's faithfulness and his trust in Raju for granted. It is in this context that one recalls Raju's comment on Marco, after the fall, as he ironically says: "I had several problems to contend with. Her husband was the least of them. He was a good man, completely preoccupied, probably a man with an abnormal capacity for trust." In fact, Marco's trust in the basic good and virtue in human nature may be regarded as the redeeming feature in the otherwise inconsiderate eccentric. It is in this context that one recalls Marco's reaction to Rosie's betrayal. He puts it thus: "I didn't know that hotel catered for such fervid art-lovers."

In a way Marco's reaction to Rosie's betrayal also appears typical. His determination to abandon the sinner remains unequivocal. He says: "You are not my wife .... I don't want you here, but if you are going to be here, don't talk. That is all." His reaction to Raju's breach of faith also appears equally characteristic. Says the man of few words: "Let us be done with everything and then you get out of my sight."

In the context of Marco's untheatrical and most quiet reaction to the betrayal, one may recall the reaction of Othello, the supposed cuckold. In Othello's case, a soul-corroding sense of betrayal is based on his tragic love. Marco is certainly shocked. It is, however, the reaction of the egoist who would never let it affect his equanimity unduly. Othello, ironically believing 'honest' Iago, determines to strangle Desdemona in the bed she 'polluted.' Marco, on the other hand, being a dignified scholar, has no intention of even shouting at Rosie. Instead, he determines to disregard her totally and finally abandons her. Othello-suffers untold miseries, ironically regarding himself as the real cuckold: "horn'd man's a monster and a beast" (Shakespeare, 1623:4.i) and painfully cries:

O, now for ever

Farewell, the tranquil mind, farewell content ...
Farewell! Othello's occupation gone!

The stunned and pained Marco through "the look of despair on his face" and appearing "vacant" underlines the painful sense of being the cuckold. But he had better and more dedicative pursuit than to indulge in the story of the betrayal.

Marco's keeping the promise by faithfully acknowledging Raju's help in his book and his gesture of sending Rosie's jewellery may possibly be interpreted as Oddity and eccentricity respectively. As a matter of fact, it adds a silver lining to his otherwise darkish portrayal. Ironically, it is the Cardish Marco's passivity which seems to pull the string and make Rosie and Raju dance.

The Lord of Misrule and His Coterie

At the Qutset, the name Nataraj (The Man-Eater of Malgudi) makes Narayan's ironic intentions quite clear. If

Lord Shiva (another name of Nataraj) is mainly associated with the tandavanritya and is reputed to have restored the disorderly chaotic universe, the printer Nataraj, although finds himself obliged to dance on many stages, is basically realised as the 'Lord of Misrule.' As one considers Nataraj as a full-length study of eccentricity, one may become aware of the multi-levelled implications the character underlines.

Significantly enough, Nataraj seems to be introducing himself as an eccentric printer by exemplifying his strange attitude in the context on his kindred souls, particularly the poet, and Sen the journalist, the daily visitors of his parlour at the Trust Printing Press. Totally unmindful of the basic principle of business psychology, Nataraj lends his ears to their innocuous tales and his place for their comfort. He even prides over the fact his parlour becomes serviceable for the common good: "Anyone who found his feet aching as he passed down Market Road was welcome to rest in my parlour on any seat that happened to be vacant."

Nataraj is never preoccupied with the profit motive and in the reversal of order (as a businessman) he exemplifies honesty as the motto of his business. Instead of showing rivalry to the next-door printer of the Star Press, the owner of the original German Heildberg, Nataraj, eccentrically enough, is often caught persuading the customers to go to the neighbour for excellence, and to top it, he genuinely feels proud of the 'machine' as if he himself owned it. Following the essentially eccentric trait in his nature, Nataraj in his first encounter with Vasu, advises him to order less number of visiting cards to keep them fresh and presents himself as a scatter-brained businessman inviting bankruptcy.

It may be pointed out that the comically dramatised scenes of Nataraj's eccentricity seem to be suggesting serious implications. Primarily, Nataraj symbolises the good (as against the bad epitomised by Vasu) in the novel. Beneath the veneer of the eccentric behaviour, one may discern his self-effacing and altruistic nature. His attitude also focuses on his essentially social sense and human consideration as against Vasu's egoistic and inhuman attitude.

In the peaceful and quiet Malgudi, Vasu comes like a maelstrom and plays havoc with the lives of the Malgudians. Nataraj seems to have been the first victim of the "rakshasa." But strangely enough, forgetting his tormenting and evil ways Nataraj finds himself admiring and congratulating Vasu for his exemplary single handedness in taxidermy-the root cause of the whole trouble-and he even becomes unhappy for not being able to talk to him. Nataraj philosophises his stand thus: "I could never be a successful enemy to anyone. Any enmity worried me night and day.... It bothered me like a toothache."

Interestingly, the eccentric trait seems to have coloured his mind as well. When the bully (Vasu) forcibly takes him to the Mempi village and mercilessly drops him there, Nataraj's imagination runs with him and he says: "I was struck with a sudden fear that this man was perhaps abducting me and was going to demand a ransom for releasing me from some tiger-cave. What would my wife and little son do if they were suddenly asked to produce fifty thousand rupees for my release?"

Ironically enough, the essentially virtuous Nataraj, the typical family man, like Srinivas in Mr. Sampath finds himself stirred uneasily and temptingly in the presence of the seductive temple prostitute Rangi when she tells him Vasu's plan to shoot the temple elephant Kumar: "My blood tingled with unholy excitement. I let my mind slide into a wild fantasy of seduction and passion. I was no longer a married man with a child and home. I was an adolescent lost in dreams over a nude photograph ... I hoped I would not weaken." One may certainly discern here the essentially timid and weak Nataraj. What is also realised is his typical and inherent middle-class psychology with its faculty of fertile imagination fantasizing the wildest possible things.

Finally, Nataraj's mind, totally obsessed with the singular thought of the imminent threat to the life of the sacred elephant Kumar, undergoes severest tension and he lets out a terrific cry, Oh, Vishnu" drowning all the voices in the temple. Although it may be interpreted as the oddest and the most eccentric of Nataraj's acts, it may also be taken as the symbolic dramatisation of the story of Gajendra-Moksha mentioned in the context of Vasu's rebellion. The cry, in other words, may be interpreted as the belief in God's intervention to help the devotee out of his disaster. Finally, the eccentric even comes to believe that after all he himself must have finished Vasu. It may, however, be taken as the reiteration of the average Malgudi hero's myth-making trait.

As one takes into consideration the rest of the eccentrics in the novel, one recalls M.K. Naik's observation, "In terms of character, The Man-Eater of Malgudi presents the largest single concentration of eccentrics in Narayan's entire fiction." The eccentrics make their bizarre world funnily and absurdly alive with their weirdest antics. Sen the armchair journalist, all set to launch his paper, is always caught criticizing Nehru's policies. He also happens to be the first Malgudian to dare Vasu, who often humiliated the forms calling him 'the local Nehru.' Although a two liner, Sen travels an through the novel. The poet, though basically a teacher, has no name and is known as the "monosyllabic poet." His chiefly and singularly realised eccentricity is reflected in his poetic composition-The Radha Kalyan-versified in strictly, monosyllabic form. He often carved the required monosyllables out of polysyllables when he ran out of them. Nataraj is thrilled to hear the line 'Girls with girls did dance in trance.' To him the composition, Radha Kalyan, has more devotional than literary value.

Interestingly, he too suspects Nataraj to be the 'Giant Killer' and bolts away with his life when the latter offers him the stuffed cub left by Vasu. About the poet, Gerow Edwin says: "The poet is perhaps the antithetical character, the non-agent. His facelessness is understood by his namelessness. Or perhaps Narayan intends rather to emphasise the poet's universality: in the beginning was the Word." The Forestry Officer is yet another caricature realised with a distinct mark of idiosyncrasy. Funnily enough he boasts to have been attacked eighteen times by the rogue elephants. He seems to be reputed to have tracked on foot an average of at least one tiger every half year. The Officer has collected the Golden Thoughts. He wants Nataraj to print the book enabling him to distribute the copies free of cost to school children and thus serve his country. The one liner also obliquely comments on Vasu's malevolent nature.

Dr. Joshi may be regarded as the exemplification of Narayan's obsession with the types. He clings to his unborn hospital. Although a veterinary surgeon, Dr. Joshi is all eager to treat Nataraj and disarms the latter by grandly philosophizing: "Only the stimuli and medicinal doses differ between human beings and animals." Even a one liner of a tailor (at the Mempi village) merrily pops and buoyantly plays his one minute role. He is all set to puncture Nataraj's plan to take the ailing elephant to Malgudi. A member of the temple committee, the tailor is a suspect accomplice of Vasu in his diabolic plan to shoot the elephant. Thus he too indirectly reflects Vasu's dark design.

Considering the treatment of eccentricity in The Man-Eater of Malgudi in its entirety it may be realised that the novel seems to have been written when "Narayan's irony was reigning supreme. It may also be pointed out that by presenting the eccentrics from different walks of life Narayan seems to be suggesting the essentially incongruous nature of life. As the novel closes on a happy note of the extinction of the evil and the restoration of peace and order, the novelist's positive philosophy of life may be discerned. Besides the recurring patterns like the hero's coming back to the world of normalcy, the assertion of the average and the ordinary and the realisation of sanity through illusion, the novel is realised as Narayan's typical comedy underlining the celebration and continuity of life symbolised in the form of Shastri as "the embodiment of the Gitaic doctrine of selfless love, necessary action."

The Oldish Gandhian

At the outset there seems to be a general consensus among the critics and readers of Narayan's novels to regard Jagan; the protagonist in The Vendor of Sweets as a fully realised eccentric after Nataraj in The Man-Eater of Malgudi. It may also be pointed out that the apparently ambivalent nature of lapan seems to lend most to his overall image as the odd man out. As an eccentric, Jagan is mainly focussed as a characteristic Shastra-abider and as a unique Gandhian. Putting it differently, if Jagan keeps quoting and exemplifying the Shastrasand the Gita, he also remains equally shrewd and practical businessman hoarding his unaccounted money. And even though, as a Gandhian, he apparently professes and practises the Gandhi principles like non-violence, non-cooperation and ahimsa, his Gandhism, in its actual realisation, seems to have been reduced to mere trivialities and fads. It may, however, be possible to regard Jagan's oddity in his role as the follower of these two principles as Narayan's strategy to artfully conceal and camouflage the protagonist's quest (as a common man betraying human foibles and fallibilities) for the spiritual realisation. Apart from these two traits spelling out the oddities, Jagan seems to breathe eccentricity throughout the novel. It may be worthwhile to underline certain obvious instances and note the implications.

The most obvious oddity becomes noticeable in Jagan's peculiar relationship with his son Mali. The apparently caring and loving father is often seen worrying and fretting over the young boy's habit of eating less. The father longs to see his son eat well and eat more: "Jagan had an almost maternal obsession about the boy feeding properly." Personally, however, he is hardly found telling his son so. Like a benevolent guardian he sees to it that the poor eater gets enough money (to eat as he likes outside the home). One often notices him expressing his deep concern for the motherless child to the cousin who has been assigned the duty to look after the welfare of his son. Beneath the oddity of the father's relationship with his son, Narayan seems to underline Jagan's painful awareness of the cleavage between him and Mali. .But, more than the commonly realised generation gap, Narayan seems to suggest the irony of fate in Jagan's case. His only son Mali, the gift of the God of seven hills, instead of becoming the solace of the fond father and widower, seems destined to constantly give him moments of pain and anxiety. It may also be noted that the artfully introduced dissonance between Mali and Jagan eventually becomes responsible for Jagan's renunciation.

When Jagan learns the disturbing news about Mali's turning a college dropout, he is in fact much distressed but shows no inclination to send his son a show cause notice as it were. On the other hand; Jagan seems soon reconciled to the son's decision, innocently dreaming the happy prospects of Mali's becoming a writer. But again, he learns that the son has left for America helping himself on the sizeable chunk from his ingeniously hidden money. However, the shock-wave seems to be Jagan's momentary reaction, because the odd man is caught thinking that it is after all the son's money and that he has only to ask for it. In this particular instance Narayan seems to underline the basic nature of Jagan: his love for the son scores more than his love for money. He does not become obsessed with the thought of accumulating wealth like his cousin Margayya. Needless to say, Jagan is a far cry from Shylock. Putting it differently, the ambivalence in Jagan's behaviour seems to comment, although obliquely, on the fact that despite his being the shrewdest businessman in Malgudi, Jagan would never hesitate to put his relationship with Mali before the money matters.

Another apparently eccentric act of Jagan, the thriving and shrewd businessman (who would not hesitate even to recycle the left over sweets and sell them again), is seen in his steeply reducing the price of his sweets and sell them at an astonishingly low rate. Although he tries to cover it as a benevolent act enabling him to see the poorest of the poor child happy, the whole thing obviously seems to have been triggered out of the polluting was of Mali and Grace. It may be called the puritan's reaction to the unholy act of the deviants. The eccentric-to all business community-plays havoc with the (sweets) market and is found, to the surprise of the business delegates, engaging the free cooks and discoursing on the Bhagvad Gita. To the delegates he says: "As Lord Krishna says in the Gita, it is all in one's hand. Make up your mind and you will all find the object of your search;" One may, however, add that, although behaving outrageously eccentric, Jagan seems to be really putting himself on the right track which, as shall be seen in the typology of sanyasa, may take him towards the light of self-realisation.

At first it may look odd that when he becomes fully aware that the deviant son very much needs his help for his acquittal from the police custody for getting caught with a bottle of liquor in his car, Jagan checks his melting heart and possibly the tears for the boy and march on towards his spiritual goal. It may be noted that Jagan does not simply march off before carefully assigning Mali's problem (and also the welfare of the shop) to the most trusted and competent cousin. Beneath the odd act (of marching away), however, one may perceive the sane follower of the Ideals of the Hindu way of life, the desirable renunciation, after having fully played his role at the grahasthashrama.

Finally, Jagan's instruction to the cousin to buy Grace a return ticket to America may also appear rather odd for the much suffered and grieved businessman. One may again perceive beneath Jagan's so-called eccentricity, his gracious gesture shown to the most ungracious Grace when he finally says to the cousin: "If you meet her, tell her that if she ever wants to go back to her country, I will buy her a ticket. It is a duty we owe her. She was a good girl. Significantly enough, Jagan seems to have imbibed the principle of forgiveness, possibly because he could read her predicament and see her as an innocent person despite her obvious deviation.

In the final analysis, Jagan's so-called eccentricity seems to be Narayan's strategy to underline the common man's search for identity and spiritual realisation. The art of the novelist lies, so it seems, in the fact that he presents his protagonist as a probable study of the full-fledged eccentric and an admirable authentic specimen of humanity.

The Malgudi Cousin

The Vendor of Sweets opens in the active and full presence of the cousin and it also closes as he plays the most trustworthy alter-ego of the protagonist, ready to perform the entrusted duty. It may also be noted that like the headmaster and the medium in The English Teacher and the poet in The Man-Eater of Malgudi the cousin, with his denomination seems to playa symbolic role in The Vendor of Sweets. It is especially in his relationship with Jagan that he plays quite a few roles. It may be significant to underline these roles and their implications.

At the outset the cousin is realised as an expert in tasting the sweets. In fact he plays the connoisseur in the profession of tasting the sweets. He tastes the sweets, especially the new experiments, almost as a ritual and gives his-the expert's-opinion which is accepted and respected by the owner of the shop. What seems to be concealed beneath the cousin's rather unusual profession (at least in the Indian context) is the paradoxical realisation that the owner of the sweets, wrapped up in the illusory world as he is, seems to be destined not to enjoy the sweetness of life; the sane cousin, symbolizing Jagan's subconscious mind, however, seems to.

The cousin (in the context of his relationship with Jagan, that is) plays the most important role of the uncle to Mali. If for Mali's benefit he plays a benevolent uncle and, unlike Jagan, a sympathiser of his modern world, the cousin, in fact, plays the most needed medium for the old father to realise his son's intentions. It is here that he provides Jagan all the necessary information about Mali and his schemes. It is through the cousin that Jagan learns about his son's plans to quit the college, to go to America and to market the novel-writing machine. Ironically enough, he happens to be the only person (until, of course, Jagan meets the hair-dyer) who is often seen giving a piece of advice to the Gita preacher: "What is all your study of the Gita worth if you cannot keep your mind untouched by all this? You yourself have explained to me that one should not identify oneself with objects or circumstances."

A man about town, the cousin, as a typically cast do-gooder plays the all-time helper to those who seek his help. Known to all and being the most knowledgeable person in all practical matters, he is often seen helping out one family or another. (For instance, he offers his company to a pilgrimage-bound family.)

Finally, he is seen, risking his life and pedalling the bike most perilously and giving the already distressed father the news of Mali's arrest. It is through this scene that he emerges as a competent custodian of Mali's welfare and Jagan's shop. It may also be noted that it is through this scene that Narayan presents one of the most memorable caricatures in his novels. This is how the novelist telescopes him:

> He saw his cousin riding down clumsily on a bicycle, his tuft flying in the wind, his wheel zig-zagging perilously on to the edge of the storm drain and retracting miraculously to the centre of the road. Jagan stood arrested .... The wheels seemed to come straight for him .... The cousin helplessly dashed past him a dozen yards, and fell down off the saddle, leaving the bicycle to bolt away by itself to a ditch. (184-85)

In the final analysis, the cousin seems to serve Jagan's ears, eyes and the subconscious self. He is realised as Jagan's alter-ago symbolizing the latter's sanity. Paradoxically, it is through the 'parasitical existence' that the cousin plays the most supporting friend of Jagan.

The Hair-Dyer

Chinna Dorai, the sculptor-cum-hair-dyer, has a specifically tailored role in The Vendor of Sweets: to initiate the confused and bewildered householder to the Shastra-dictated vanaprasthasharma, the threshold of sanyasa. Apparently a thumb-nail sketch, the hair-dyer, as a caricature, plays a functional role. It is in the context of the hair-dyer's role in Jagan's spiritual realisation that Iyengar says: "From the electronics of the novel-writing, Jagan is switched back to the sanity of the bearded men 'this man from the previous millennium' whose life is centred in bringing a deity to life out of a stone, and installing it on a vacant temple pedestal near a pond in the recesses of the Mempi forest. It is the Goddess Gayatri-to be seen nowhere else, the deity of Radiance-who is to come out of the stone." (381) The novelist seems to have blown some life into the airy figure, as, for instance, he is realised through certain idiosyncrasies including his bouncing like a child and plucking and eating a guava.

It may be noted that the hair-dyer's eccentricity is realised in his odd and rather mysterious ways. Narayan seems to have cast him basically as a symbolic character. It is in this sense that the hair-dyer appears all set to offer Jagan, the disillusioned man, a 'promise of spring,' a sort of spiritual revelation. As always, Narayan artfully conceals this intention by making the sculptor-turned-dyer (who offers youthful appearance to the grey-haired people) a rather dubious character. Jagan, for instance, goes to the extent of speculating that, "he might ... have been born to a passing concubine of his so-called master who never married."

In the last analysis, it may be suggested that the eccentrics in The Vendor of Sweets, like all their previous counterparts, seem to wear the masks of oddity, concealing certain serious issues related to the central character and the theme of the novel. And, like all other eccentrics in Narayan, they may also be taken as the symbolic representation of the absurd and incongruous nature of human existence. The typology of eccentricity, especially in the context of the central character, notes the recurring patterns of the Narayan novel. Thus, Jagan's stepping into the vanaprasthashrama may be symbolically taken as the return of the native lost temporarily in the world of Maya. Jagan's determination to march towards the spiritually conceived resort and leaving the warring issues of the worldliness behind, may be taken as the assertion of the tradition over the deviating modernity. Finally, his act of deserting Mali seems to obliquely comment on the Karma consequence.

By now it has become evident that Narayan's obsession with the eccentrics seems to be one of the salient features of his character portrayals. As for his comedy, the eccentrics constitute the crux of his comic art. It may also be pointed out excepting very few eccentrics like Ebenezar (Swami and Friends), most of them have been realised with thematic relevance. Barring Nataraj (The Man-Eater of Malgudi), Ramani (The Dark Room) and Jagan (The Vendor of Sweets), most of them remain caricatures. As a matter of fact the ordinarily realised heroes too invariably display a strong streak of eccentricity in their character.

The Townhall Professor

As one considers the treatment of eccentricity, besides Raman and Daisy showing distinct streaks of Oddity in their nature and behaviour, the Townhall Professor is formally introduced as the 'local eccentric' in The Painter of Signs. Reminiscent of the Madras Crank in The Financial Expert, the Professor, sitting cross-legged like Buddha, and donning the purple attire, sells the talismen carrying 'secret messages' and delivers his spiritual messages in catchy phrases: "Past is gone, present is going, and tomorrow is day after tomorrow's yesterday. So why worry about everything? God is in all this.

He is one and invisible. He is in yesterday, tomorrow, and today."

In the eccentric's utterances, one may possibly discern a universal message underlining the ephemeral nature of human life, the supremacy of the wheel of existence and the omnipotence and omnipresence of God. As for Raman, the local eccentric plays a symbolically realised role. Ironically, Raman, determined to establish the age of reason, seems to have been taken for a ride, as he falls unwittingly into the trap of the crank and finds himself losing the newly painted signboard in exchange of a mere piece of paper with the message 'This will pass.' Raman seems to have read the connotation of the message. His reaction is typical: "He studied the message, and its significance seemed to deepen while he brooded over it, giving him a feeling of perpetually gliding away from the Objects and moments. Losing all sense of stagnation, Raman felt suddenly light at heart."

Significantly, the one-liner eccentric's message for Raman becomes prophetic. It seems to indicate the passing of the illusory phase in Raman's life symbolised in his 'Daisyism.' At the end of- the novel as Daisy goes away and Raman throws away the key and returns to the solid world of reality represented by the 'boardless' friends, the prophecy in the message is fully realised.

Moreover, the message, 'This will pass,' seems to have a wider implication. It seems to be the threading principle in all Narayan novels. The normal peace and rhythm of life, suddenly disrupted by the ascending of a tempest, eventually returns to its original state as the average and the ordinary voice finds itself asserting against the illusory temptation. Narayan, perhaps, meant the same thing when he said to Naipaul: "India will go on." (Naipaul, 1977:18) It fully expresses Narayan's faith in the eternity principle of Indian culture, its overwhelming capacity to assimilate the foreign (and warring) elements and finally to assert its existence.

Considering the treatment of eccentricity in its entirety in the novels of Narayan, it may be pointed out that at the outset the eccentric trait seems to be the commonly shared attribute of the Malgudi character. The trait is realised on different scales from character to character. Putting it differently it has appeared just a streak in some characters, it has become a dominant trait for some, and it has been realised as an entire form of expression for some other. One may certainly discern a distinct growth and development in Narayan's delineation of eccentrics.

Excepting one or two, most of the eccentrics have a thematic relevance. It may also be noted that most of the caricatures have extremely narrow, almost microscopic existence, but they invariably make an imprint, playing catalysts or foils or choric roles. As regards the protagonists, besides their apparently humorous realisation, they also seem to underline the inherent incongruity and offer serious issues like the spiritual, ethical, cultural and philosophical notions in life.

The eccentrics in Narayan's novels may also point to the novelist's character delineation. As a delineator of surface human character, Narayan finds the eccentrics more conducive. It is here that the caricatures as types figure prominently and are realised through their idiosyncrasy and apparent incongruity. It may also account for Narayan's flat characters as against the round ones.

The eccentrics have primarily been focussed through their humorous realisation, telescoped as either their attitude or behavioural pattern. It is in their portrayal as comic creation that one may also discern Narayan's conception of comedy which, although basically creates mirth and laughter, is not divorced from tragedy.

It may also be pointed out that excepting a female character, Shanta Bai in The Dark Room, displaying some streaks of eccentricity, most of the eccentrics in Narayan are male characters. It is probably because women in the middle-class family "represent 'custom and reason' and know 'what is and what is not proper." Putting it differently, Narayan seems to be suggesting that since women in culturally dominated Hindu society imbibe the principle of acceptance, they remain more centric as against the deviatingly eccentric men.

Finally, one may also find the eccentrics, in some cases at least, stressing the recurring patterns of all the Malgudi novels. In that, they underline the cultural ethos, (the strategy of) the circular journey of the protagonist and the assertion of the average and the ordinary.

8

Personal Transformation and Sanyasa in R. K. Narayan

The setting of R.K. Narayan's novel, The Guide, as in most of his novels, is Malgudi, a fictional town in southern India. The novel is told through a series of flashbacks. Raju, the central character, grows up near a railway station, and becomes a shopkeeper, and then a resourceful tourist guide. He meets Rosie, a beautiful dancer, and her husband, whom Raju nicknames Marco, because the man dresses in a thick jacket and helmet as if undertaking an expedition, like Marco Polo. Marco is a scholar and anthropologist, who is more interested in his research than in his young wife Rosie.

Rosie and Marco engage Raju's services as a tourist guide, and he takes them sightseeing. She wants to see a king cobra dancing; Marco wants to study cave paintings. Rosie and Marco quarrel constantly, and Marco remains cold and aloof toward Rosie. While Marco is away studying cave paintings, Raju falls in love with Rosie. When Marco discovers that Raju and Rosie have become lovers, Marco abandons her and returns to Madras.

Raju becomes infatuated with Rosie. He is so obsessed with Rosie that he forgets his business, falls into debt, and loses his shop at the railway station. He also loses his mother's respect because he is living with a married woman. Raju's mother moves out of their house, and the house is claimed to pay off his debts.

Raju encourages Rosie to resume her career as a dancer, and becomes her manager, launching her on a successful career as an interpreter of Bharat Natya, the classical dance of India. But he spends money extravagantly, and is tricked by Marco into forging Rosie's signature for a package of her jewels, a mistake that earns him a two-year prison sentence.

On his release from prison, Raju stops to rest near an abandoned temple, where a villager named Velan mistakes him for a holy man. Raju does not want to return in disgrace to his friends in Malgudi, and reluctantly decides to play the part of a holy man. He is happy to accept the daily offering of food which the villagers bring him. Gradually he accepts the role which has been thrust upon him, and he acts as spiritual advisor to the village community.

Raju is content with the arrangement, until a drought occurs, and, to save face, he has to take up a 12-day fast. As a great crowd gathers to watch him during his ordeal, he begins to believe in the role he has created. He has taken on an unselfish task, not for love or money, for the first time in his life. Despite grave danger to his health, he continues to fast until he collapses. His legs sag down as he feels that the rain is falling in the hills. The ending of the novel leaves unanswered the question of whether he dies, or whether the drought has really ended.

A central theme of the novel is the transformation of Raju from his role as a tour guide to that of a spiritual guide. The title of the novel, The Guide, has a double meaning, and Raju is in a sense a double character. As a tour guide and lover, he is impulsive, unprincipled, and self-indulgent. After his imprisonment, and after his transformation as a holy man, he is careful, thoughtful, and self-disciplined.

The novel also tells two stories, that of Raju's relationship with Rosie, and that of Raju's relationship with the villagers as a holy man. The novel begins with Raju sitting beside the temple and meeting the villager named Velan, who mistakes him for a holy man. The novel then alternates between an account of Raju's career as a holy man, which is told in the third-person, and Raju's account to Velan of his previous career as a tour guide and lover, which is told in the first-person. This dualism reflects the dualism in Raju's character. He is transformed from a sinner to a saint, though he is never truly a sinner, and never truly a saint. Because of his capacity for empathy, Raju is a sympathetic character throughout the novel.

Sanyasa is the fourth stage in the religious life of a person and enjoins upon him the complete renunciation of the world and its possessions and attachment. It means the abandonment of temporal concerns; total abstention from sexual enjoyment. Following are some of the definitions and views related to the concept of sanyasa:

Kamanam karmanam nyasam samnyasam kavayo viduh

(Renunciation is the relinquishment of all actions goaded by passion.)

—*Bhagavadgita*, XVIII-2

Jneyah sa nityasamnyasi yo na dvesti na kanksati
nirdvandvo hi mahabaho sukham bandhat pramucyate

(He who neither loathes nor desires should be known as one who has ever the spirit of renunciation: for free from dualities he is released easily, O Arjuna, from bondage.)

—*Bhagavadgita* V-3

yad-ahareva virajet tad-ahareva pravrajet

(One can become a recluse as soon as one feels disgusted with the world). —*Jabalopanisad*

Saptatya urdhvam samnyasam upadis' anti

(One can take up the Sanyasa after seventy).

—*Baudhayanasmrti*

vanesu ca vihrtyaivam trtiyam bhagam ayusah
caturtham ayuso bhagam tyaktva sangan parityajet

> (After having spent the third part of one's life in the forest one can free from all attachments and spend the fourth part of one's life as a recluse.)
>
> —*Manusmrti*

A sanyasi is one who renounces everything and undergoes a complete change of personality. Why one would become a sanyasi is not easily answered a personal tragedy or frustration, a deep compelling philosophy of life, or flash of illumination may drive one to seek a change. Whatever be the cause, when one becomes a sanyasi, one obliterates one's past. A sanyasi is to be taken as he is at the moment. You can never ask a sanyasi about his ealier life. He will never refer to it. It would be a crass, inconsiderate act even to ask a sanyasi his name. He assumes a new name, bearing no mark of his ancestry or class, but indicative of some general beatitude. He has freed himself from all possessions and human ties. Among certain sects; the man will even perform his own funeral ritualistically before becoming a sanyasi. A sanyasi is a wanderer living on alms, never rooted to any place except when he seeks the seclusion of a cave or forest at some stage for prolonged meditation.

The Shastra-based concept of sanyasa noted along with Narayan's similar and traditionally realised view on the fourth ashrama, have great relevance in the context of the typology of sanyasa. The views may also serve as excellent points of reference especially in dealing with the different faces of sanyasa in Narayan's novels.

Talking to Ved Mehta (1971), Narayan confessed that he just couldn't write any novel without the name of 'Krishna or Hanuman.' He also said that "to be a good writer anywhere one should have roots in the religion and the family." He seems to make it clear that the Indian culture, realised through a typically orthodox family, forms the bedrock of the house of his fiction. Therefore, it may be desirable to read Narayan's novels from the essentially Indian perspective. One of the ways, as Amur suggests, is to consider Narayan novels realised through the Hindu family culture, particularly, the ashrama system and the purusharth frame. Read closely, all Narayan novels may be interpreted as the fictionalisation of these purusharthas and the ashrama-dharmas. It is here that sanyasa assumes great importance as a frame in the typological study of the characters in Narayan's novels.

At the outset sanyasa becomes the logical and concluding frame of the typology chiefly because it forms the other end of the typology (innocence being its first end). Significantly enough, like all the earlier typologies, sanyasa too is a recurring feature in Narayan's novels. Almost every Narayan novel has a sanyasi character. The different faces of sanyasa in Narayan's novels may make it possible to view Narayan's notion of sanyasa it may also be possible to underline the implications underlying the individual cases and note the strategies Narayan employs to delineate the sanyasi portrayals.

Swami Sans Sanyas

Narayan's first novel, Swami and Friends, has to be skipped over obviously because it does not have a sanyasi figure. A closer look at the title of the novel, however, makes an interestingly ironic point. As M.K. Naik points out that the 'Swami' in the title raises our anticipation for a sanyasi figure, cladding ochrish garb and having a beard. Our anticipation, however, get deflated as Swami turns out to be a typical school boy. It may also suggest the world of appearances, fully realised in the later Narayan novels, particularly in the context of the portrayal of sanyasis.

The Skin-Deep Sanyasi

Interestingly, Narayan's second novel, The Bachelor of Arts, has two faces of sanyasa: the popularly realised one and the fake one. The graduating Chandran, in the early part of the novel, is confronted with a genuine-looking sanyasi who is, however, taken as a thief stealing flowers. It is only after he is caught by Chandran's father and almost man-handled by

Chandran that he is identified as the sanyasi. In an apparent case of mistaken identity, one may, however, discern other implications as well. First, the scene projects the cultural psyche symbolised in Chandran's mother. (She has not been given any name so as to underline the representational image.) The moment she realises the mistake, she becomes panicky arid exclaims: "Ah, leave him alone, let him go." Beneath her panic seems to be concealed the belief that the curse of the holy man may fall on the family. Secondly, the scene also underlines a far-reaching irony: Chandran, the antagonistic youth, after the failure in love, finds himself turning into a sanyasi, obviously a fake one. There also seems to be a deep irony: in case of the genuine sanyasi serenity seems to have been taken as triviality, and in Chandran's case triviality is regarded as serenity.

As the desperado unwittingly runs into a Kailas, and encounters a prostitute, he is horrified and consequently finds himself playing a sanyasi. Initially as his own decision and later as the rustics's compulsive desire, Chandran continues to play the sanyasi sponging on the hospitality of the village community. But as the mask (on account of the pricking conscience) starts paining him, he sheds off the holy clothes, casts off the fake role and returns to the world of normal life. In an apparently simple act of donning and discarding the ascetic's robes, several implications seem to be concealed.

At the outset the kind of sanyasa Chandran plays, seems to be the travesty of the sanyasa dharma prescribed in the Shastras. Sanyasa comes as the last and culminating stage in the ashrama system. Needless to say, it also bespeaks the maturity of the mind to understand the serious and decidedly purposive nature of sanyasa. Chandran's so-called sanyasa may be regarded as the most impulsive act which, indirectly perhaps, seems to be flouting the sacred codes and religious order. It is here that one recalls the sublime sanyasa of Adi Shankaracharya as against the trivially and ridiculously realised sanyasa of Chandran. Although Chandran's sanyasa decidedly underlines his totally illusory notion of life-from Malathi to the fake sanyasa and, by implication, his deviation from the traditionally accepted norms, it may, however, be said that the youth's becoming a sanyasi seems probable and perhaps a natural act in the Indian context. It is therefore difficult to accept T.D. Brunton's view that "Narayan spoils this novel, typically, by the unlikely episode in which Chandran runs off as a sanyasi." But equally important is Narayan's unmistakable suggestion of the undesirably illusory notion of sanyasa. Chandran is evidently seen suffering in his sanyasi robes. It is only when he discards the cherished clothes and puts on the ordinary and plain ones that he once again feels free and almost rejuvenated. Ironically, it is not the sanyasi but the ordinary man of the world that is shown happy with himself. Beneath the irony, however, is the suggestion of the madness of illusion and the wisdom and sanity of the ordinary, real life which seems to underline the view that "individual aberration may be tolerated for a while-by society or by the Gods-but must inevitably erode."

As in Swami and Friends, the strategy of rite de passage is employed in The Bachelor of Arts as Chandran passes through the two crucial stages of experience: one with Kailas and the other with the rustics. The journey realised on the geographical as well as the mental plane proves to be the self-realizing and self-educating experience for Chandran. Realizing the folly of his playing the fake sanyasi, feeling guilty for the naive rustics and sorry for the parents, Chandran returns home. It is here that the theme of the return of the native seems to have been suggested. In Chandran's return what seems to be concealed is the assertion of the average and the ordinary symbolised in the mute but deciding force of the rustics and Chandran's own realisation of his essentially ordinary self. In other words, it is through Chandran's sanyasa that Narayan reiterates the pervading theme of his novels: illusion versus reality.

The Dark Room does not fit into the typology of sanyasa for the obvious reason that it does not have a sanyasi figure. Although Savitri's renouncement of the worldly possessions may remind us of a sanyasini, it is realised with obviously ironic overtones. Unlike the genuine one, motivated by the hope of salvation, Savitri merely wants to commit suicide and put an end to her humiliating and slavish life. Skipping it over, one may turn to The English Teacher.

The Trinity of Sanyasa

If the eccentrics in Narayan represent every walk of life, the sanyasis in his novels reflect several types in human life. The English Teacher displays three types, each underlining ironic implications. The first of the three sanyasis, known as the Swamiji, is introduced as the 'Man with his forehead ablaze with sacred ash, and a thick rosary around neck and matted hair.' The spiritual healer, invited for the sake of the ailing Susila, underlines the mistaken identity as the agnostic Krishnan takes him for a beggar and says, "Go away." As he gives a pinch of holy ash to the patient and ties a talisman to her arm, Narayan seems to present the sanyasi as a holy man. A dot of a caricature, however, has subtly realised implications.

At the outset the bearded Swamiji seems to be an incarnation of the sanyasi in The Bachelor of Arts. He also seems to install the exorcist in Mr. Sampath. Krishnan's mother shares the attitude of Chandran's mother towards the holy man. The Swamiji symbolises common man's (spiritual) reverence for and faith in the miraculous and godly power of the spiritual healer. One also notes different attitudes towards him. Dr. Shankar, the family doctor, though takes an almost non-committal stance, he certainly does not disown the holy man. Krishnan's fury at the sight of the Swamiji clearly indicates the former's agnostic and scientific attitude to godmen. But more important seems to be the irony concealed in the attitude towards the Swamiji. It may be recalled that towards the end of the novel, Krishnan not only echoes the family doctor's view of the unknown ways of the holy men but also unreservedly accepts it.

The protagonist himself plays a symbolically realised sanyasi in The English Teacher. At the end of the novel, as he ultimately succeeds in attaining spiritual communication with his dead wife Susila, and as he realises that the boundaries between life and death get dissolved, he finds himself at the threshold of a new awareness. He is now in a position to look at life and its issues from a wider perspective. It is at this point of time that Krishnan, like many of Narayan's heroes, as Walsh points out, determines to have 'life freed from hysterics and distorting illusions.' (1973:13) And knowing fully well what he is required to do, he acts immediately. Krishnan takes two decisions almost simultaneously: he determines to join the headmaster's Leave Them Alone school for children and tenders his resignation to the Principal of his college. It is here that he displays the basic aptitude for sanyasa: he shows willingness to detach himself from the worldliness and has accepted, what S.C. Harrex calls 'the inevitability of the dissolution of human ties.'

In Krishnan, Narayan presents a symbolically realised sanyasi. The novelist deceptively suggests Krishnan's dissatisfaction in 'earning and spending,' reflected in his talk with the Principal. He says, "I have no use for money." His leaving Leela at her granny's house may also be taken as the protagonist's gesture of the snapping of the ties in the world (conceived as maya). Significantly, to underline the spiritual aspiration of 'the uncompromising idealist,' the novelist suggestively introduced the English teacher's association with Plato. Krishnan says: "I will ... get through this stuff on Plato-Plato's idealism, I read."

In the final analysis, although Krishnan does not don the ochrish robes and traditionally enter the sanyasashrama, he seems to imbibe the essential principles of sanyasa. In fact Krishnan's spiritual development, although particularised in his decision to "write poetry and live and work with children and watch their minds unfold," may be discerned in his ability to understand the 'Law of Life' and act accordingly. Harrex puts it thus: "Krishnan's development follows a recognizable Vedantic path of selfhood. By submitting to the 'law of life,' which necessitates the renunciation of attachment, he severs some of the spiritually constricting bonds of Maya."

And most significantly, the sanyasi seems to have discovered the root cause of human misery and the basic truth of human existence. Krishnan's philosophy does not sound verbose and airy. On the contrary, it sounds authentic, as it has emerged out of his personal life, and seems to have a universal endorsement: "We come together only to depart. ... The Law of life cannot be avoided.... All struggle and misery in life is due to our attempt to arrest this law or get away from it... The fact must be recognised. A profound unmitigated loneliness is the only truth of life."

The eccentric headmaster may also be considered as a typical sanyasi in The English Teacher. Significantly, sanyasa in his case, does not come as the natural stage of his life but only as a resort. In a queerly realised story, when the headmaster survives the prophecy of his own death, he determinedly turns his back on his household and dedicates his life for the experimental school for children, called Leave Them Alone. It may also be noted that unlike Krishnan's sanyasa, taken as the culmination of his philosophical development, the headmaster's, however laudable, remains basically the whim of the eccentric.

One finds it difficult to suspend one's disbelief and accept the innovative and experimental school founded and developed by the headmaster. The atmosphere of the school has not been properly evoked and even the children in the school have been realised as stock figures, reflecting their fascination for stories and displaying their creative imagination. They seem to play their measured or tailored roles. As regards the school, it has more of an airy and dreamy than solid and real atmosphere. It is here that Narayan's symbolic intentions behind the school become clear. The school, representing the essence of good and innocence in the form of children, remains the symbol of Krishnan's sanyasa. Contrasted with the warring world, represented by the headmaster's household, the Leave Them Alone school symbolises ideal world represented by the joyous and divinely innocent company of the children.

In the final analysis, The English Teacher may be considered, like its protagonist, a three-dimensional study of sanyasa represented by the one liner Swamiji, the cardish headmaster and the round character of the English teacher whose growth seems to have been realised through the catalyst, headmaster and the ficelle called 'Medium.'

Two Faces of Sanyasa

It is essential to be aware of the domina tingly realised title-role in Mr. Sampath, to underline Narayan's treatment of sanyasa in it. The novel brings into focus the dubious, corrupted and unholy world of (Mr.) Sampath, over-shadowing the quiet, uncorrupted and essentially innocent world of Srinivas. It may be Narayan's oblique way of suggesting that a holy-man (a sanyasi) may never be able to breathe comfortably in the unholy world of Sampaths. He, however, presents two characters in the novel, whose life-style may be viewed through the concept of sanyasa.

The landlord in Mr. Sampath is generally realised as the most miserly and eccentric old man. Although to Srinivas and his wife he presents himself as a sanyasi, having no material interests or desires, he is seen contentedly eating the refreshing rice-cakes at their place and later asking for a piece of areca nut. Reality reveals the landlord to be a money maniac, never bothered to care for the genuine complaints of his tenants and living miserly and all by himself. (One, however, feels sorry for his unholy tryst with Sampath and his loss of money). But the old shark has a redeeming feature-a tender concern for his marriageable grand-daughter for whose sake he often grows sentimental and would not hesitate to keep the strings of his purse rather loose. In the final analysis, the landlord makes an extremely poor impression as a sanyasi. Although he says, "The true Sanyasi has no need to live on anything more than the leavings of God," one knows it pretty well that it is the miser and not the ascetic who is speaking. If, as a sanyasi, he is seen praying everyday several times, as a hoarder he prevents even the most religious of his tenants from hanging a picture on the wall lest the walls should be weakened. It may, however, be noted that despite the travesty of sanyasa he exemplifies, the landlord decidedly suggests the culturally deep rooted influence of sanyasa.

The other character to be considered under the typology of sanyasa in Mr. Sampath is Shanti. As a matter of fact the glamorous young woman seems to be obviously lured to the irresistible world of money and glamour. Besides playing the seductively realised Parvati, Shanti literally plays havoc with every male around. It may indeed seem most paradoxical to regard the artist's Beatrice, Sam path's seductive companion and Srinivas's charmer, as a sanyasini. But India being the land of 'perpetual paradox,' (Brata) where even a seductress may be transformed into a sanyasini, Shanti in the final scene of the novel seems to be flinging away her earlier role of a gay and bewitching beauty and taking on the serious role of a sanyasini.

Perhaps by some stretch of imagination one may consider the last phase of Shanti's role as a sanyasini. In the denouement, Shanti, in a way like Chandran, undergoes traumatic and nerve-killing experience, thanks mainly to the mad lover, Ravi. It is under such a psychologically harrowing state of mind that the irritated and exasperated widow seems to have been entreated by the roguish lover-Sampath to share his life as a wife. Shanti, having possibly realised the threateningly uprooting nature of illusory love, decides to call it a day. She writes to Sampath before she leaves him for good. Her note reads: "I am sick of this kind of life, and marriage frightens me .... Please leave me alone .... If I find you pursuing me, I will shave off my head and fling away my jewellery and wear a white saree. You and people like you will run away at the Sight of me. I am, after all, a widow and can shave my head and disfigure myself if I like." The shaving off of the head suggests the traditionally conceived widowed sanyasini. The note reveals the realisation of her folly and the willingness to accept and follow the sane and solid world of reality. In Narayan, "the significance lies in gesture but not in the result." Thus, it may be noted that in her threat to disfigure herself if pursued by the blind lover, and her determination to return to her child, seems to be concealed the assertion of the sane, average and unruffled mind. It is here that the chastened Shanti seems to be waving off to the world of illusion and deviation and marching towards the world of reality and acceptance. One may read the unmistakable suggestion of the growth in Shanti, indicated through the employment of the strategy of rite de passage (realised in her trip to the Mempi forest). Shanti remains a one liner and is realised as a symbolic character underlining the moral deviation.

The Sanyasi as Margaya

Although Margayya (The Financial Expert) shares the gift of the gab and the instinctive shrewdness with Sampath (Mr. Sampath) and Raju (The Guide), he is markedly different from the other two rogues. He is neither realised through the corruptible world of Sam path nor is he ever known for the romantic disposition like Raju. Margayya's ruling passion seems to be his abnormal attachment for the world of wealth. Ironically enough, if the basic urge to accumulate wealth made him an economic avatar, the Icarus thirst for fortune ultimately saw his fall as well. Significantly, Margayya's role as a money-wizard is interlined with a sanyasi, who as a Narayan character, presents yet another face of sanyasa.

In The Financial Expert, the sanyasi is primarily realised as the temple priest. He is also known as the spiritual healer and is in fact involved in the cure of a difficult case of a Child-patient. The priest, however, plays the most vital role in the life of Margayya as he shows the latter the way to propitiate the Goddess of Wealth, Laxmi. The priest prescribes the most intricate kind of Puja which, underlining significant implications, merits a closer attention.

At the outset the priest is known as the most knowledgeable spiritual head. If a seeker desires the way to be known, the priest will not hesitate to oblige him with the prescription. The priest is also regarded as an authority on the Shastras, the inherent basis of the cultural ethos. For instance, he makes us aware of the most whimsical yet extremely influential Saturn and the rivalry between the Goddess Laxmi and Goddess Saraswati. The priest underlines the symbolic meaning of milk, lotus, fire and the rest. The symbols too have thematic relevance. (Karakala, 1974) Finally, the priest echoes the Gitaic principle of Karma as he tells Margayya: "Results are not in our hands."

The temple priest is realised as a sanyasi in other ways too. When Margayya, for instance, asks him about his experience of the Mantra, the priest's answer is typical as he says: "Me! ... I'm a sanyasi, I have no use for it." It is here that the selflessness of sanyasa is stressed. Or better still, the priest is realised as the nishkam karmayogi. As an ascetic, he has no desire for the worldly things and he seems to prefer to remain absolutely unattached. It is in this context that the sanyasi is often likened to a tree offering fruits to the wayfarers while desiring none for itself.

The priest is also realised in one more context underlining the Shastra-prescribed life of a sanyasi. A sanyasi is always regarded as the citizen of the world. Having already renounced his home, he is seen as a wandering monk and is invariably associated with a pilgrimage. Later, the priest goes "to Benares-from there he is going on foot all along the course of the Ganges, to its very source in the Himalayas." Narayan contrasts the ideal sanyasi with the immature young temple priest with his sour look and rude behaviour. In the final analysis the priest, the one liner in The Financial Expert, plays a functional role. He is instrumental in transforming Margayya's entire life. In this he primarily plays a catalyst and a ficelle. It is in this sense that the temple priest symbolically plays a margayya (the pathshower) to Krishna, the financial expert.

The Sanyasi Mahatma

The critical consensus is far from being happy with Waiting for the Mahatma, particularly with Narayan's portrayal of Mahatma Gandhi. The critics point out that Narayan fails to evoke the essential spirit of Gandhi. Raji Narasimhan, however, thinks that "no other Indo-English writer merges with the Gandhian myth more unselfconsciously than does Narayan upto a point." In the context of the typology of sanyasa, Narayan's Gandhi may be regarded as a rare sanyasi portrayal. Interestingly enough, Narayan's Gandhi, unlike the traditionally conceived image of the long-haired and bearded figure wrapped in the ochre-coloured clothes, turns out to be what Winston Churchill used to say, the 'half-naked fakir.' In his unique appearance, perhaps, one may read a suggestion of a characteristic sanyasi played by Gandhi.

Narayan's overall portrayal of Gandhi, unlike that of Rao's (Kanthapura) or Anand's (Untouchable), remains unpoetic and mirrors the well-known and popularly conceived image of the Mahatma. Putting it differently, Narayan's Gandhi turns out to be a cliched figure. The novelist, thus, underlines Gandhi's truth and non-violence, his emphasis on selfless or disinterested Karma and duty as religion and his advocacy of self-reliance and Swadeshi. Even the actual realisation of Gandhi is also based on his cliched image: Gandhi, reciting his bhajan or the famous Ram-dhoon, his time-bound morning walk, his long-strides (making you run) and his conversational habit, his insistence on spinning the daily quota of yarn as dedication and self-discipline, his cleanliness, Harijan association, evening prayers and finally his murder, have been recorded (though not always authentically as Narasimhaiah points out, a false note in Narayan's description of Gandhi's 'booming' voice through the popularly known images of the Mahatma.

Gandhi's asceticism has very little to do with the traditionally conceived notion of sanyasa: renunciation. He has not renounced the affairs of the world. What, however, stands out is the fact that despite living and fully involved in the world, he has never been realised through the 'ways of the world.' Gandhi's role may indeed be interpreted as a sanyasi because he seems to imbibe the essentials of sanyasa. Like a sadhu, he has minimum needs, is mainly realised as spiritual guide (to Sriram and Bharati) and comes to be regarded as the citizen of the world. Like a sanyasi he lives a detached and selfless life playing the benevolent role for humanity.

Besides Gandhi, there seems to be one more character to be considered under the typology of sanyasa. It's Sriram's granny, playing a sanyasini. Interestingly, granny seems to playa rival to Gandhi and tries, helplessly though, to win over Sriram from him. In fact, her role as a sanyasini may be regarded as the indirect outcome of Gandhi's influence on Sriram and Bharati. But apart from it, her sanyasa may be considered as an independently realised act.

Granny's firm decision to go to Benares seems to be based on the traditional belief, especially in the Hindu community, that if one spends the last moments of one's life in Kashi, the most sacred place of pilgrimage, taking the daily dip in the purifying river and worshipping the God Vishveshvara, one is blessed with a permanent seat in Heaven. The pilgrimage that offers jeevan-mukti, freedom from the perennially operating wheel of existence, must certainly have been known to granny. It is because of her faith in the Shastra-Vachan that she could snap the delicate family strings. Sriram's granny seems to symbolise Narayan's idea of ideal womanhood. She exemplifies the ideal in both the phases of her life. In the first phase, she plays the most benevolent and almost dedicated role of Sriram's caretaker after the accidental and premature death of his father. She plays the caretaker grandly and hands over a sizeable amount of money left by her son, to Sriram, the heir apparent, as soon as he completes twenty years of his age.

In the second phase of her life, despite her genuine concern for the grandson and her deep attachment to him, the moment she realises that her traditional convictions and her entire religiosity would never be cherished by Sriram and the Gandhi-girl Bharati (having an unsurpassable grudge against Gandhi's Harijan association) the pollution conscious woman determines to go on a final pilgrimage, to Benares. In her unequivocal decision to snap the family bondage and leave for the holy place granny exemplifies the age-old faith in the Shastras. It is here that Sriram's granny installs Raman's aunt (The Painter of Signs), and in a way Jagan (The Vendor of Sweets).

In the final analysis Waiting for the Mahatma seems to project a unique presentment of two faces of sanyasa: the symbolic and the traditional. If for Gandhi, he neither renounces the worldly affairs nor does he lead to the Himalayas like a conventional sanyasi, he, however, imbibes the inherent principles of sanyasa and lives like a sanyasi. In fact, he seems to have epitomised, what may be called Sanyasa-Vritti or sanyasa consciousness. Gandhi's character in Waiting for the Mahatma may certainly be regarded as Narayan's contribution to the study of sanyasa.

In terms of his role in Waiting for the Mahatma, Gandhi's basic image as a sanyasi seems to have influenced the lives of Sriram and Bharati. It is because of the formidable but benevolent image of Gandhi that they attain the marital bliss going through the flame tests of exemplifying dedication to duty, self-control and morally evoked codes of conduct. It is because of his strict adherence to morality that Sriram (despite his fits of passion) and Bharati exemplify the brahmacharya, a sound and Shastra-dictated foundation for the happy marital relationship. Gandhi, as a character, however, remains flat.

The other face of sanyasa in Waiting for the Mahatma belongs to granny, a person for whom tradition is sacrosanct. Although as a type she voices the traditional codes she seems to play an equally important role against Bharati, the New Woman. Interestingly enough, although both the women represent Gandhi's ideals of Indian womanhood (at different stages of life, playing different roles) they, ironically, do not seem destined to live together. It may also be noted that despite their totally different worlds and ideals, both the women share the principle of assertion for the conviction and sanctity of human relationship. Granny, however, remains a cardish character and becomes a symbol of old values.

The Mask and the Face Sanyasa

The Guide remains the most interpretative novel bespeaking Narayan's deep understanding of the human predicament. Thematically, no novel of Narayan has raised such fundamental questions related to human existence as The Guide. Some of the themes dealt with in The Guide seem to be sin and redemption or crime and punishment, modernity versus tradition, material self against the spiritual self, illusion and reality et al. Significantly enough, the basic issues in The Guide, although they have the universal application, seem to have been realised through the Indian perspective. Narayan seems to underline a sort of 'Eastern Solution' to the fundamental problems shared by the world community.

As regards the typology of sanyasa in The Guide, it may be useful to note the sanyasa phase of the protagonist underlining the essential stages of his ascetism. The first stage in the final phase of Raju's life begins as he closes the door on his past life. And, as if preordainedly schemed, he is taken as a sadhu by a villager, Velan, as he accidentally finds himself at the outskirts of a village called Mangala. The old habit of getting involved in other people's affairs impels him and before Raju himself could properly understand the nature of the new situation, he accepts the role of an ascetic given by Velan. It is essential to mention that a mere dot of a character, Velan's recalcitrant sister plays a vitally important role in Raju's ultimate sainthood by admiringly confessing the change of her heart. She says: "He doesn't speak to anyone, but if he looks at you you are Changed." And soon enough, every second person in the village, attributing any turn of good luck to the holy presence of the ascetic, helps Raju to play the new role. The first phase ultimately marks him as the villagers willingly and reverentially accept him as their spiritual guide.

Several implications underlie this phase. Raju basically remains his usual earthly opportunist, feeling happy to have been accepted as the guest of honour by the village community, making full use of his art of the gab and playing yet one more role. One may also add that his inherent instinct to get involved in other people's affairs and to play the role other people give him may not brand him as a sinner. In fact, Raju's initiation to sainthood has an unmistakable suggestion of the preordained scheme of the world and the 'element of chance,' suggesting, perhaps, the puppetry existence of human beings. The phrase clearly suggests one of the themes of the novel: mistaken identity or illusion versus reality. One also notes the basic difference in Raju's playing his part and Velan's living his and the irony in the disciple's dictating the Guru, and most importantly, in accepting the ex-convict as an ascetic.

Once Raju feels confident about his smooth landing in the new territory, he sort of takes the stock of things. The village community, nurtured on the traditional culture, welcomes his arrival and treats him like a yogi. Raju, on his part, reads the community's religious psychology as the letters on the wall and decides to play the new role of a saint with thorough preparation. He determines "to look as brilliant as he could manage, let drop gems of thoughts from his lips, assume all the radiance available." His efforts to play the saint with the sophistication of an actor, and the rustic community's indomitable faith in his spiritual power soon find him growing in stature beyond his own imagination.

The third stage is initially marked with Raju's decision to look his part. Says the narrator: "Raju soon realised that his spiritual status would be enhanced if he grew a beard and long hair to fall on his nape. A clean-shaven, close-haired saint was an anomaly." Gradually Raju comes to be realised as Mr. Know-all, playing all sorts of roles arising out of necessity. He starts prescribing the medicine, mostly for the children, and the community unhesitatingly takes him as a spiritual healer. Raju also plays the village judge to sort out their disputts and quarrels. Ironically enough, when the saint finds everything well with his world, destiny seems to interfere with the smooth and happy run of his life and Raju receives the severest jolt of his life. It all begins with the severe drought the villagers suffer and find themselves breaking each other's heads. As the restive saint asks a village moron to deliver the message, "Unless they are good I'll never eat," the latter twists it and blurts out saying, "The Swami, Swami, does not want food any more... because... it doesn't rain." Thus, unknown to himself, Raju makes them believe that he is undertaking a fast to bring rain.

Significantly enough, in all the roles Raju plays, there seems to be an unmistakable hand of destiny. One notes that Raju feels obliged to change his role as he finds himself at the peak of his involvement in it. As the third stage leads him, rather forcibly, to undertake the fast, one notes the mute but formidable influence of the community of the rustics. It may also be possible to read the twisting of Raju's simple message as a Karma-consequence. Although Raju plays the sanyasi quite seriously, basically he remains a charlatan. Narayan telescopes Raju's typically rascalic attitude to the drought oriented fight at the village in these words: "Personally, he felt that the best thing for them would be to blow each other's brains out. That keep them from bothering too much about the drought." And, finally, one may as well consider the caricature of the semi-moron. It is through him that Narayan underlines life's most absurd ironies. The semi-moron, finding himself at a loose end casually decides to pay a visit to the Swami and receive his blessing. But life's irony operates with such devastating nature that the semi-moron, instead of receiving the Swami's blessing, seems to deliver the latter the death warrant as it were. The tiny dot of a character also seems to project the triumphing of the average over the extraordinary.

The fourth stage of Raju's enforced sainthood begins as the repentant and guilty rustics devoutly behold him as 'the fasting saint.' Raju, unaware of the reality even discourses on the food on the fateful day. It is only when Raju says, "Tomorrow I'll take my usual food" and the shocked and bewildered disciple asks him, "Do you expect it to ram tomorrow?" that he understands the serious implication of the twisted message and ultimately becomes aware of the death-trap he unconsciously walks into. Although he feels touched as the gullibles honestly express their sense of gratitude by trying to touch his feet, the awareness of the impending threat to his life scares him and as a last resort he makes a clean and thorough confession of his sinful past to Velan, hoping thereby to escape the jaws of death. But Velan exemplifies the genuine stuff of the disciple and remains unmoved.

The phase has rich symbolic and ironic overtones. As Raju finds himself helplessly trapped in his own scheme, one may clearly read Narayan's subtle suggestion of the Karma-theory and the preordained nature of life. One also notes the subtle irony operating throughout the phase. Commenting on the ironic realisation of Raju Velan relationship, M. K. Naik says: "as R.S. Singh points out, Raju is judged twice, first by the judge who sentences him for forgery and next by Velan who pardons him, even after knowing that the so-called saint is charlatan . But a further and more subtle touch of irony in the situation seems to have escaped Singh's notice. The judge ruins Raju's career as an impresario but Raju's prison life is happy, whereas Velan's pardon only in effect tightens the noose around Raju's neck." We may add that although at the outset Velan's 'pardoning' seems to be taking the charlatan to the scaffold, a close reading of the scene may, however, reveal that as Raju's was going to be the martyr's death, in a way, Velan offers him the eternal life.

On the first day in his fasting phase Raju remains essentially his old self, gulping down the stale food and finds himself painfully chased by the thoughts of food. Comes a time when he wins over his hunger and gradually gets involved in his new role of the fasting ascetic. One even finds him arguing with himself, thus: "If by avoiding food I should help the trees bloom, and the grass grow, why not do it thoroughly?" A definite and distinct change in Raju's basic attitude may be noticed as the narrator says: "For the first time in his life ... he was doing a thing in which he was not personally interested." The ordeal of fasting continues till the last day of the fast when finally the saint declares: "It's raining in the hills. I can feel it coming under my feet, up my legs." And he 'sags.'

The last phase of Raju's fast underlines several implications. And the end of the novel marks one of the rare instances of Narayan's teasing ambiguities. It may be relevant to underline different characteristic interpretations of Raju's last role. Balarama Gupta argues that Raju lives a sinner and dies a sinner. He thinks that the "rains he sees (or thinks he sees) are indeed, a pathetic hallucination of a starving imposter." Uma Parameswaran views Raju's final phase on similar lines. Her thesis is that though Raju plays the sanyasi with full application and dedication, he does not change a whit and dies as the mask becomes the noose suffocating the 'player' to death. She pays a 'tribute to Narayan's ambiguity and art' but insists that the rogue (Raju) dies as a rogue. Meenakshi Mukherjee thinks that Raju plays the sanyasi well in keeping with his previous reputation as an accomplished role-player. Her assertion is: "Towards the end Raju loses the feeling of an actor performing an act; the act becomes reality, the mask becomes the man, and Raju the Guide turns into a guru." She joins those critics who believe that a picaroon was making a room for the holy pilgrim. Meenakshi Mukerhjee also notes that Kalo in Bhattacharya's He Who Rides a Tiger, finding the mask painful, finally' dares and fillings it away and stands fully exposed with his original punic self. "The man who rode the tiger ultimately did have the courage to kill it in order to dismount it." She, however, concludes that Raju prefers to keep the killing mask, until it becomes the skin itself.

The ambivalent nature of the ending of The Guide makes it difficult to ascertain the kind of death Raju meets: a martyr's?, or, a commoner's? Although Narayan remains silent, he is not without suggestions. It is through the tell-tale signs that one may forward a theory that the common charlaton, undergoing rite de passage ultimately becomes a martyr.

The first marked change in the charlatan is seen as the enforced saint realises the tremendous faith of the rustics in the miraculous powers of a saint. He recollects the similar story of the penance he had told them: "When the time comes, everything will be alright. Even the man who would bring you the rain will appear, all of a sudden. It may also be possible to read the suggestion of the martyr's death in Graham Greene's advice to Narayan to show Raju dead at the end of the novel: "While I was hesitating whether to leave my hero alive of dead at the end of the story, Graham was definite that he should die. Narayan's own statement that "Yesterday's demon, perhaps, becomes tomorrow's god, after a revolutionary or purgatorial process of change" may prompt one to read Raju's story as the 'ensainted sinner." Finally, Raju's death, as 'death by water' underlines the sanctimonious nature of the martyr's death. In the final analysis the typology of Sanyasa seems to underline yet another face of a sanyasi in The Guide. Raju, although resembling the fake sanyasi Chandran in The Bachelor of Arts, stands unique as his sanyasa is realised ironically and with significant traditional overtones. The sanyasa here may be taken as Narayan's strategy to present the story of crime and punishment on the moral and ethical plane of realisation.

Jagan wills Sanyasa

At the outset there seems to be striking parallels between Narayan's The Financial Expert and The Vendor of Sweets. Both Margayya and Jagan have been realised through their ironical names. Putting it differently, if the former, contrary to his name, as the path shower, seems to get lost in the material world, the latter, denoting the Sun-God, often finds himself enveloped in the illusory darkness of the world. Both have been blessed with a single male issue, face the unbridgeable gap between the spoilt sons and themselves and, finally, seem destined to witness the exit of their sons (temporarily though) from their home and town. Both the sons return after some time and play havoc with the life of their sires, especially as they get involved with immoral affairs. The differences between them, though few, seem to be significant as they underline their characteristic individualities.

Margayya, despite the sea-Change in his life, finally, returns to the family folds as the family man of the beginning of the novel. Jagan, however, having played his full innings and experienced the traumatic moments in his later life, decides, as a thriving businessman, to call it a day and marches towards the Shastra dictated vanaprasthashrama. Margayya comes out as the man with Midas touch and consequently faces the nemesis. Jagan, although meticulously hoarded his unaccounted cash, did not lament when it vanished. In the final analysis Margayya's realisation remains quite thin and within the confines of his family fold and household duties. Jagan's realisation, however, appears more meaningful as he renounces the world and hopes to see the light of spiritual enlightenment. Although Jagan plays an eccentric and a 'sanyasi to be' with equal felicity, he seems to have been cut out to play the latter under the guise of the former. At the end of The Vendor of Sweets, as he determinedly marches towards the pond, snapping the worldly ties, carrying a bank book and saying to the cousin, his alter-go and confidant: "I am going to watch a goddess come out of a stone. If I don't like the place, I wil1 go away somewhere else. I am a free man," Narayan seems to present yet another face of a sanyasi absolutely human and full of foils and foibles. It may be worth while to underline the chain-reactions that ultimately become responsible for Jagan's renunciation. In other words, one may mark the significant stages of his life related to his final decision to become a sanyasi.

As a young and sensitive collegiate, Jagan had most enthusiastically responded to Mahatma Gandhi's call for the struggle for independence. As a satyagrahi he had rushed into the British Collector's bungalow and while trying desperately to bring down the Union lack and plant the Indian flag on the roof, he suffered some really nasty cuts on his skull. Although one may not completely overlook the rather dubious nature of young Jagan's patriotic act, especially because of his repeated failures as the possible reason behind the satyagraha, one may not altogether rule out the possibility of Jagan's being a genuine article. The novelist seems to subtly establish the link between the Gandhian satyagrahi and the determined sanyasi seen at the end of the novel.

Jagan's marriage interlude has a distinctly authentic ring of Indianness. Two important issues concerning his relationship with his wife, Ambika, merit our attention. As a youthful husband Jagan, the passionate and unleashed colt, must have given the young girl Ambika moments of embarrassment playing the over-sexed husband. But soon enough, he gives the indication of developing an entirely surrealistic attitude to sex, viewing the whole phenomenon thus: "He felt fatigued by all the apparatus of sex, its promises and its futility, the sadness and the sweat at the end of it all". The second issue is related to Jagan's only offspring, Mali. Mali's birth, after the most painful and trying period for the parents, proves significant, giving Jagan a sense of pride, putting an end to his doubtful virility and elevating Ambika's status as the mother of a son and bringing her humiliatingly sterile existence to an end. But soon enough, after Ambika passed away leaving an acutely felt lacuna in Jagan's life. One may take the loner's state of mind, in a way, conducive for the state of sanyasa.

Grace seems to revive Ambika's association in Jagan. But more than the feminine principle (fascinating the widower, at least once, through her 'ivory hued kneecap') what stands out, in the context of his relationship with Grace, is Jagan's humanitarian outlook. Despite her foreign identity Jagan accepts Grace as a daughter-in-law and develops a tender concern for her. But when he learns about her 'living in sin' with Mali, the image of the daughter-in-law in his mind gets distorted and marred and he feels terribly hurt and disturbed. It is here that the tainted image of Grace may be taken as an indirect cause to draw the future moment of sanyasa nearer for Jagan.

Mali, Jagan's only son, seems to be destined to give his father the painful moments of discomfiture and worry all his life. The spoilt son has practically nothing to share with his father and is realised as an antagonistic figure for him. Ironically enough, the gift of the God of seven hills has, through every act of his, become responsible to widen the gap between his modernity and Jagan's tradition. Thus, Mali's unceremoniously quitting the college, his leaving for America, getting involved with the fantastic novel-writing machine, living with Grace without marriage and finally his getting arrested distinctly and loudly speak for his disharmonious relationship with Jagan. Mali also seems to help Jagan march towards vanaprasthashrama. Jagan's total snapping of the communication with the deviant Mali, his desperate efforts to keep himself away from the tainted sinners his decision to give it a try to the invitation given by the sculptor to but the place to make It a spiritual resort and witness the Goddess of Radiance coming out of the stone. and, his firm refusal to get involved in Mali's problem may speak for the genuine sanyasi and logically put him at the threshold of vanaprastha, the penultimate stage of sanyasa.

It may be significant to underline Jagan's Gandhism and his abiding faith in the Shastras as the definite contributory factors to his renunciation. One may also note these two principles realised with the typically Narayan touches of Irony, comedy and satire. Although Jagan's image of the Gandhian appears genuine when he was quite young, in his later years, however, Jagan's following of the Gandhi principles seem to be reduced to its travesty and a few fads. One notes Jagan's practising of non-violence in procuring the leather of the dying cows, (and in the process almost killing his wife), his strict following of dietary methods (abstaining from sugar and consuming just a few drops of honey) and other daily chores like taking cold water bath and spinning (as a duty bound activity) etc. have an unmistakable stamp of Gandhi-principles reduced to their external applications only. One also notes Jagan's non-cooperation with the sinners in the most characteristic way: "Jagan barricaded himself in completely. He derived a peculiar pleasure in performing all the actions of a purificatory nature. He shut the communicating door between his part of the dwelling and Mali's and locked it on his Side. He did everything possible to insulate himself from the evil radiations of an unmarried couple living together."

As regards the influence of the Shastras on Jagan's mind, one becomes aware of it right from the first page of The Vendor of Sweets. The novel opens with Jagan's quoting of a" philosophic platitude: an unquestionable and Irrefutable Shastra-Vachan: "Conquer taste, and you will have conquered the self ... because all our sages advise so." As a matter of fact Jagan is often found quoting some Shastra or the Gita and may indeed be regarded as the astute follower of the Hindu way of life. Despite its ironic realisation (Jagan's reading of the Gita and super vising the culinary activities often go simultaneously), the facts remains that he always moves under the shadow of the Shastras.

The most obvious influence of the Shastras seems to be sharply realised in his reaction to the ways of the sinners. The moralist in him simply falls to understand the nature of the moral deviants. He is found musing thus: "He stood looking at the girl. She looked so good and virtuous; he had relied on her so much and yet here she was living in sin and talking casually about it all. 'What breed of creatures are these?' he wondered. They had tainted his ancient home."

Finally, as the faithful follower of the Shastra dictums Jagan must be well aware of the significance of renunciation as the most desirable stage in the life of a Hindu householder. Jagan religiously believes that at sixty one enters a new janma. This is how he regards himself: "He was fit only for retirement. What a magic word! If one had to shake off things, one did it unmistakably, completely, without leaving any loophole or a path back."

The ambivalent nature of Jagan, primarily realised as he plays a Shastra-abider and a Gandhian, seems to be responsible for the multiple views of his sanyasa expressed by the critics. William Walsh for instance, seems to honestly regard Jagan as a genuine sanyasi-to-be: "Jagan's decision to retire from the world is not only part of the national tradition .... It follows the bias of his own nature. He is ... pious, attentive to scriptures, observant of customs, scrupulous about rituals."

M.K. Naik however, seems to take a different view. He seems to present Jagan as a far cry from a true sanyasi. "If old Jagan's Gandhism is only skin-deep ... his renunciation cannot be authentic either. The ancient Hindu ideal of renunciation, of course, holds a romantic glamour for modern westerners, and this perhaps explains how even an extremely perceptive critic like William Walsh is tempted to swallow Jagan's renunciation, hook, line and sinker, without noticing the glaring inherent inconsistencies involved."

The ambivalence in the character of Jagan is so pervading that it seems to be Narayan's strategy to present his sanyasi as imperfectly human as possible. This apparently strange trait may, thus, account for Jagan's forgiving Grace, the tainted defiler of his pious household and his willingness to buy her a return ticket to America, his refusal to get involved in Mali's problems and his viewing the sculptor sceptically. Jagan obviously does not seem to trust the old hair-dyer unconditionally and may take him seriously only after the emergence of the Goddess out of the stone. He cannot help thinking over the possibility of the hermit being his master's illegitimate issue. Says the narrator: "Jagan wanted to ask, but he suppressed the question, whether he might not have been born to a passing concubine of his so-called master who never ... married." "Finally, the so-called ambivalence in his nature seems to follow him to the last moment. It is here that although Jagan seems to follow the Shastras as he marches towards the pond in the spirit of renunciation, he apparently remains his calculating self. He hands over the charge of the shop to the cousin and does not forget to take with him the bankbook along with the charkha. The sanyasi is yet to see the five faced Gayatri, the Goddess of Radiance and until then perhaps, he is not prepared to take any chances. How very practical he is and yet how very human he remains.

In the final analysis Jagan's symbolic initiation to sanyasa seems to be the most obvious and logical culmination of his life-long quest for the spiritual realisation.

The Second Sanyasini

If The Painter of Signs comes to be regarded as a minor work, the novel seems to make a significant contribution to the typological study of sanyasa. Again, if a 'comedy about birth control' presents Narayan's rather negatively viewed New Woman, The Painter of Signs telescopes the sanyasa motif through a vividly sketched out sanyasini, played by Raman's aunt, reminiscent of Sriram's granny in Waiting for the Mahatma.

Like most minor characters in Narayan, the aunt in The Painter of Signs, is realised as a type and a stock figure, showing typical characteristic traits. At the opening of the novel, the aunt is presented as a sorrier edition of her former youthful self. She is quite garrulous, reminiscential but equally forgetful. She keeps repeating the heroic story of her grandfather. She meticulously manages the household and lets the nephew merrily live by painting the signboards and chatting with the 'Boardless' friends. She invariably spends her evenings at the temple, listening to the Harikathas. To consider her character under the typology of sanyasa, it may be essential to focus on her role in relation to (a) Raman and (b) Daisy.

Raman's aunt, despite her name Laxmi, is basically realised, like Raju's mother and Sri ram's granny, as a mother-figure. Although she exemplifies the tradition-based world of old values, striking a noticeable contrast to Raman's modernity, she seems to be quite contented living with him and religiously playing his mother-substitute. She is virtually shocked to witness her nephew's open alliance with the modern girl with dubious character. As her advice to 'keep off the girl' falls on Raman's deaf ears, she reads the nephew's disregard of her and her own defeat in the battle of sexes and takes the unequivocal decision to go on a pilgrimage. Significantly, her departure to Benares coincides with Raman's preparation to bring the bride home. Although the aunt's decision to go on a pilgrimage may be taken as an outcome of Raman's deviation from the accepted codes, she, nevertheless, exemplifies the traditionally conceived sanyasa-renunciation-by snapping off the worldly ties and aiming for the Moksha. Although one never witnesses a confrontation between Raman's aunt and

Daisy, one may, however, read an absolute incompatability between them. The two women obviously belong to the diagonally opposite worlds of values. If the aunt epitomises the traditionally realised ideals and absolute faith in the socio-moral codes, Daisy plainly shows her amoral attitude to sex and seems to have little regard for the Shastras and codes in her scheme of life. One way of realizing the aunt's renunciation is to read Narayan's intention of obliquely underlining Daisy's deviation. It may also be noted that both the women leave Raman in the end and, interestingly enough, both of them seem to be leading to their individual goals, clearly marked with tradition and modernity.

In the final analysis, the aunt's sanyasa, reminiscent of Jagan's renunciation in The Vendor of Sweets, seems to be basically realised through her notion of sanctity in the man-woman relationship. Raman's aunt, however, scores over Jagan's bank-book association and his obviously sceptic attitude to renunciation. The one liner illumines as a sanyasini, especially as she marches towards Benares with total determination and unruffled soul. The aunt, however, remains a flat character and plays a symbolic role.

The Exemplary Sanyasi

Narayan's conception of (human) life is so deeply rooted in the culture of his soil that possibly every novel of his, as K.V.S. Murti (124-62) points out, has a mythological soul. He has consciously made use of the mythological analogies in The Man-Eater of Malgudi and The Painter of Signs. Narayan's recurring use of the myths and mythological parallels to explore the complex nature of human relationship recalls Eliot's strategy of employing the 'usable past.' A Tiger for Malgudi, vividly showing resemblance to The Panchatantra, remains basically a tale of a quadruped gifted with a soul.

A Tiger for Malgudi has a tiger named Raja, with a soul, as the central consciousness. The genesis of the novel is narrated by Narayan himself in its preface. He read an unusual story of a hermit and his unleashed tiger companion whom the former claimed to be his brother in the previous lives. Although Narayan thought it as an incredible story, ultimately it became the source of his novel:

> It also occurred to me that with a few exceptions here and there, humans have monopolised the attention of fiction writers. Man in his smugness never imagines for a moment that other creatures may also possess ego, values, outlook, and ability to communicate. Though they may be incapable of audible human speech ... I wished to examine what the result would be if I made a tiger the central character in the novel.

Raja, the central consciousness of A Tiger for Malgudi, narrates (through the flashback), the strange tale of his spiritual awakening (thanks to the Master, his Guru) and the entire journey of his developmental stages underlining illusion and reality. At the outset A Tiger for Malgudi recalls Orwell's The Animal Farm for obvious comparison but, a closer look at the latter may reveal that it is perceived as a political allegory and is regarded as an ironic commentary on the Western phenomenon focusing on the Now and the Here of the world. Narayan's A Tiger for Malgudi, although based on the real experience, runs mostly on the lines of The Panchatantra and deals with the eternal issues like spiritual awakening and renunciation in the world of illusion or maya.

As far as the typology of sanyasa is concerned, A Tiger for Malgudi may be regarded as the closest to the traditionally conceived notion of renunciation. It also focuses on the full-fledged study of a sanyasi. Since Raja, the disciple, tells the story of his transformation achieved through his (spiritual) association with the Master, the novel also seems to deal with the guru-shishya relationship. Needless to say, these serious issues have been artfully disguised in the novel.

The ascetic, referred to as the Master by his disciple, Raja, appears in the last part of the novel, although one feels his presence as a 'bright absentee' throughout the novel. If the reader learns about the Master's spiritual existence chiefly through Raja's tale, he also gets some of his biographical details through Jayaraj the Malgudi photographer who happened to snap the Master's photograph in the latter's young days. The chequered life of the Master (as a satyagrahi, as an affluent householder, as a sanyasi) revives our memory of Rudyard Kipling's memorable portrayal of the mysterious Puran Bhagat, in The Second Jungle Book. Like Puran Bhagat, the Master, too, steps into the sanyasa after successfully performing the role of a householder.

The master epitomises the concept of sanyasa conceived in the Shastras. If he played the householder with the usual materialistic glory, he did not indulge in it but, soon enough, realised the meaninglessness and futility of that affluent life. Says the Master: "One day it seemed all wrong, a senseless repetition of activities ... and I abruptly shed everything ... and fled away from wife, children, home, possessions .... At midnight, I softly drew the bolt of our back door ... while others slept, and left very much in the manner of Siddhartha."

Narayan's portrayal of the Master may be regarded as an epitome of an ideal sanyasi. The Master, as an ascetic, must certainly have undergone the ascetic's ordeals and eventually perfected the role of a sanyasi. One may even read his spiritual power to visualise the thing crossing the limits of time and space. This may account for his sudden appearance in Malgudi. If his act of saving Raja underlines the benevolent trait of a sanyasi, his power to totally change the basic attitudes of Raja focuses on the sanyasi's spiritual influence. When the Master enters the headmaster's room, Raja still breathes the nature of the man-eater but, the moment the Master speaks simple but magnetic words "Understand that you are not a tiger ... I am your friend". Raja seems to have felt a mysterious change taking place in him. Gone is the beastly and deadly intention to attack the frail humans, and gone is also the egoist's pride of his enormous strength. Instead, he becomes subdued, humble and quiet. Thus, guiding the disciple through various philosophic discourses "God says in the Gita, 'I'm life and death, I'm the killer and the killed'" the Master eventually brings a spiritual realisation in Raja.

Significantly enough, Narayan presents a dual sanyasa in A Tiger for Malgudi. The Master, after settling, like Puran Bhagat, at the Mempi mountain resort, remains busy, perfecting his life as a yogi. He amicably but firmly refuses to go back when all of a sudden his wife appears and appeals to him to accompany her back home. (One may recall almost a similar situation in The English Teacher and also note the world of difference between the headmaster's sanyasa and the Master's.) He plays the yogi to the last moment before he senses the ripe time to attain samadhi. Simultaneously, through philosophic discourses and teachings, he initiates his disciple Raja into the sanyasa state of existence. Narayan brings a gradual change in Raja as he sheds the worldly and fleshy craving of hunger and desire and eventually shows inclination towards otherworldly existence. If Narayan presents the Master and his disciple Raja as kindred souls, then it may be imagined that as the Guru marches off towards his nirvana, the mantle of sanyasa, symbolically speaking, falls on Raja's shoulders.

In the final analysis, as Narayan presents the exemplary sanyasi reflecting the ideals of the Shastra-based sanyasa in A Tiger for Malgudi, he seems to have completed the story of sanyasa began, ironically though in his first novel Swami and Friends. The wheel turns a full circle in A Tiger for Malgudi as the typology of sanyasa meaningfully culminates into the copy book study of a sanyasi who becomes a light-house to the followers of asceticism.

As regards the characterisation in A Tiger for Malgudi, the novel, true to its parabolic nature, presents the sanyasi character in accordance with the popular notion of the holy-mystic. The fabulist presents the ascetic as a yogi whose portrayal has become quite authentic. Raja confirms to the pattern reflected in The Panchatantra stories. The novel also reiterates the usual patterns of the preceding novels. Most importantly, as the subdued and peace-loving Raja is led to the innocent world of children, Narayan seems to underline the assertion of the ordinary and the average, and, in the transformation of the ferocious 'maneater' into the 'man-entertainer' in the zoo, he seems to suggest a subtle realisation symbolizing growth.

As one takes into account the typology of sanyasa in its entirety, one notes that almost every Narayan novel has a face that either belongs to the genuine type or at least partially resembles the serious one. In terms of types there are some that seem to be fully aware of the magic of the ochre-coloured garb and they play the fake sadhus and, cash in on the naive believers' faith in the holiness and spiritual power of the sanyasi. Some of them play the sanyasi role not as a consciously planned out act but rather obligingly.

Their sanyasa, as the outcome of the troubled conscience, however, does not belittle their purposefully played role. There are others who, symbolically imbibing the essential spirit of sanyasa, renounce the materially realised world and snap worldly ties. Narayan also presents an ambivalent sceptic and a metamorphosed one. And finally one encounters the full-fledged one.

It is significant to note that if sanyasa (as the typological study reveals) mainly symbolises the deep-rooted Hindu family tradition, and is regarded as the most ideal stage of life by the culturally nourished masses, it also underlines serious implications: it becomes the novelist's strategy to focus on the deviation of the character, or it suggests the illusory way of life, or it underlines the spiritual growth of a character.

Thus, in sum, we may say that with the typological study of sanyasa, we come to the other end of Narayan's overall conception of humanity. If the typology of innocence, realised through the Hindu way of life, underlines the first stage of brahmacharya, the typology of sanyasa stresses the last stage, sanyasashrama. Again, if Narayan's perception of humanity begins with the notion of innocence, his presentment of sanyasa may mark his idea of spiritual experience. Thus he seems to view the entire humanity (characteristically symbolised in the Malgudi novels) through the universally acknowledged stages: innocence and (spiritual) experience.

9

Conclusion

It was not always so. Only those who know of his early life know what a long, sometimes heartbreaking, always arduous road he trod to reach the pinnacle that he ultimately scaled. His autobiography My Days gives an account of those early struggles. A fuller account can be found in the illuminating book by Susan Ram and N. Ram, R.K. Narayan: The Early Years - 1906-1945 (Penguin India, New Delhi, 1996).

R.K. was born on October 10, 1906 at Number 1, Vellala Street in Purasawalkam, Chennai. Much of his early childhood and school years were spent in his grandmother's house, where he was born. Later on, he moved to Mysore, where his father, R.V. Krishnaswami Iyer, served initially as a schoolteacher, and later became headmaster of Maharaja's Collegiate High School. R.K.'s academic grades were not of the highest during his school and early college days. In the B.A. examination he failed in History, but finally plodded through to get his B.A. degree. His two earliest full-length novels, Swami and Friends and The Bachelor of Arts, describe some of his trials and travails during this period. He was pressed to take up a teaching or government job. But R. K. had already made up his mind that he was going to be a writer. He managed to get several contributions accepted by The Merry Magazine (a short-lived offshoot of Ananda Vikatan in English), and by The Hindu, where he eventually obtained a weekly slot in the Sunday edition. As a bachelor, his wants were few and could be met with an income of a rupee a day.

In July 1933, R. K. fell in love. He was staying in Coimbatore with a sister, and one day he "saw a girl drawing water from the street tap and immediately fell in love with her." This was Rajam, 15 years old at the time, tall (taller than R.K. by a couple of inches), slim and good-looking. He cultivated the friendship of Rajam's book-loving headmaster father, Nageswara Iyer, and one day he came out saying, "Sir I want to marry your daughter." There were all kinds of obstacles, including the problem of matching the horoscopes (R.K.'s horoscope had "sevvai dosham"), and how to earn enough to support a wife. But, as the Latin proverb says, "Love conquers all", and R.K. married Rajam in Coimbatore on July 1, 1934. Their only daughter Hemavati (name of a Carnatic raga), Hema for short, was born in March 1936.

The greatest personal tragedy of R. K.'s life came in May-June 1939, when Rajam passed away following an attack of the dreaded typhoid. She died around midnight on Tuesday, June 6, 1939. Perhaps she could have been saved with earlier diagnosis and proper treatment. In any case, it was before the days of the antibiotics or chloramphenicol. The next few months were R.K.'s darkest days. How he survived this ordeal, and was eventually able to resume his writing, is an epic of courage and determination. Little Hema was such a source of love and affection for him. Rajam was R.K.'s one and only love. "Narayan's loyalty to his wife was such that it would outlive her and prove lifelong". A full picture of his suffering and eventual recovery can be gleaned by reading his highly autobiographical novel, The English Teacher.

It is however time to get back to R.K.'s writing career. He had completed a full length novel, Swami and Friends, in the latter half of 1932. A young friend of his, Kittu Purna, was an undergraduate at Oxford at that time. R.K. sent the manuscript to him, and Kittu was eventually able to get the already well-known author, Graham Greene, who had a home at Oxford, to take an interest in getting this novel published. Surely this was destiny at work. Greene became R.K.'s guardian angel, so to speak, and eventually Swami and Friends was published by Hamish Hamilton on October 24, 1935. From then on, Greene took upon himself the responsibility for getting R.K.'s next novel, The Bachelor of Arts, published. It was eventually published on March 15, 1937. Like Swami and Friends, the second novel was a critical success, although by no means a best-seller. His next novel, The Dark Room, was not autobiographical as his two previous books were, but a feminist view of middle-class family life in South India. It was published on October 11, 1938, and received good reviews from Western writers. One reviewer referred to "the Chekovian simplicity of the plot".

We now come to 1939, the year of R. K.'s ordeal, when Rajam left him. The poignancy of his suffering, and his ultimate return to the mundane world, are graphically described in The English Teacher, which was finally published in late September 1945. By then R.K. had "fully emerged from the period of darkness". "Thereafter his work would take a distinctly new road". It may be noted in passing that, during his dark days, music was a source of solace to him. R.K. was a self-taught veena player, but good enough to earn the commendation of the veena maestro of Mysore Palace, Vidwan Doreswamy Iyengar. They spent many hours together, and R.K. showed himself to be quite good in alapana and kirtana rendering. In return, R. K. became Doreswamy Iyengar's English teacher, and helped him obtain his B.A. degree.

"The end of 1945 found Narayan fully emerged from the period of darkness". "Thereafter his work would take a distinctly new road." Some of his best work belongs to this period. Some of his short stories, collected under such titles as An Astrologer's Day and Other Sstories (1947), Lawley Road (1956), A Horse and Two Goats (1970), Malgudi Days (1982) and Under The Banyan Tree and Other Stories (1985), were published. But it was his novels that took the readers by storm. The Financial Expert came out in 1952; The Guide, probably his greatest novel in 1958; The Maneater of Malgudi in 1961, The Vendor of Sweets in 1967; and The Painter of Signs in 1976. His literary genius was in full bloom. His publisher wanted him to draw on the rich store of Hindu mythology. R. K. obliged, and wrote two fine books Gods, Demons and others, and a popular version of The Mahabharata.

In the early 1990s R.K. left his home in Yadavagiri, Mysore, and settled down in Chennai. One reason for this might have been his desire to see his great-grandchildren more often. Hema and Chandru had a daughter and son - Minnie and Chinni (Srinivasan, who pursued his higher studies in the USA). Minnie married Srinivasamurthi, a grandson of veteran freedom fighter and one of the great orators of his time, S. Satyamurti. They have a son and a daughter and R.K. enjoyed his periodic visits to his great grandchildren at the home of their grandparents, Lakshmi and K. Krishna Moorthy, in T. Nagar. Amongst many famous authors who admired R.K.'s writings was W. Somerset Maugham. He wrote to R.K. and had intended to meet him, but missed him during his two visits to India. Natwar Singh was a good friend and great admirer of R.K. He was also very close to E.M. Forster during his Cambridge days and provided R.K. an introduction.

During the period 1985-1991, R.K. was a nominated Member of the Rajya Sabha. Even in his ninth decade "his creativity remained undiminished". Two novels, Talkative Man (1986) and The World of Nagaraj (1990) came out during this period. In fact, just hours before he went on a ventilator in hospital, he outlined to N. Ram and Mariam Ram his plot for a new novel. He wanted Ram to bring him a 2000 (last year's) diary, to enable him to start writing. In 1994, tragedy struck R. K. a second time. His beloved daughter Hema passed away. He bore this misfortune with great fortitude. Hema's husband, Chandru, stayed on with R.K. and looked after him with the utmost devotion till the end of his days. Ram was a daily visitor, usually late at night.

Narayan's honours included the Sahitya Akademi Award, the Royal Society of Literature's Christopher Benson Award, and the Padma Bhushan in 1964, elevated to the Padma Vibhushan, India's second highest civilian award, in 2000. Some stories never fade away. Malgudi, the fictional 'home' of R.K. Narayan's stories is universal and eternal. Yet it's nowhere besides in one's imagination. Geographically defined by Kabir Street, Lawley Extension, Mempi forests etc, and peopled by Swami the school boy, Sampath the printer, Jagan the vendor of sweets or Vasu the taxidermist villain, it's the quintessential small town India. The master story-teller of Malgudi would have turned 100 on October 10, if he had lived. And perhaps made light of the occasion with his puckish humour – as he indeed did on his 94th birthday. "You can also reach 94 if you live long enough," he remarked to his curious well wishers.

Rasipuram Krishnaswami lyer Narayan Swami hid a long name behind his innocuous initials. He became R. K. Narayan at the suggestion of Graham Greene, who felt his full name was simply too long. Born in Madras in 1906, he spent most of his early childhood in his granny's house, amidst playful pets and engaging narratives of epics and fables to fuel his imagination. On joining his large family of brothers and sisters, headed by the disciplinarian headmaster-father in Mysore, he had pampered access to books in English from the school library, to feed his hunger for reading. Ironically, much to the headmaster's embarrassment, he flunked his high school exams — and that too in English, as he found the textbooks too boring. No wonder, later in life as a celebrity member of the Rajya Sabha, the only time he ever spoke, was to make an impassioned plea for lessening the back-breaking load of the schoolbag After a lacklustre graduation, spent mostly daydreaming, writing poetry and short stories, loitering on the streets of Mysore observing life, people, and perhaps sketching future characters, he stubbornly refused to take up a job. He had decided to be fulltime writer.

In 1935 he managed to publish his first novel Swami and Friends through the encouragement and intervention of his literary discoverer Graham Greene who called him the "novelist I admire most in the English language." The book brought critical praise, but little money. Recalling his early struggles as a writer, Narayan joked, "I had the unique experience of having a new publisher for each book. One book, one publisher — and then perhaps he said to himself, "Hands off this writer."

By now his admirers included Somerset Maugham, John Updike and of course Graham Greene. Maugham who in the early 1940s visited Mysore asked for Narayan. But no one in the Maharajah's court knew about the celebrity writer, and it was only through a source from the university that he was located, by when the famous visitor had left town.

His breakthrough as a writer came with the publication of The English Teacher rated by most critics as his best work. Based on the traumatic experience of the tragic death of his wife, the novel is very autobiographical. In fact, so were his previous two books. If Swami and Friends was a delightful insight into the world of a small boy and his travails with apathetic adults, The Bachelor of Arts that followed was inspired by Narayan's own easy-paced college life. By now Narayan who had discovered his genre—tragi-comic irony—was a writer in full flow. The other significant books that followed were Mr. Sampath, The Financial Expert and The Guide, considered by many as his most popular novel, which was made into a film. These were followed, prominently, The Man-eater of Malgudi, The Vendor of Sweets, A Tiger for Malgudi, Talkative Man, Painter of signs and The world Of Nagaraj. His last work was the Grandmother's Tale (1993).

Central to his writerly magic is Malgudi, easily identifiable in readers' collective imagination. How was Malgudi born? Narayan recalled, "I had an idea of a railway station, a very small railway station, a wayside station....Malgudi just seemed to hurl into view. There is a place called Lalgudi and a place called Mangudi — but Malgudi is nowhere." He further added, "I wanted to be able to put in whatever I liked, and wherever I liked — a street, a despot, a school or a temple at any spot in a little world...with the result that I am unable to escape Malgudi."

Though Narayan's prose appears deceptively simple, it is a seamless flow of heart-warming tales of ordinary people, leading ordinary lives providing extraordinary insights into universal human behaviour. His endearing characters have been described as, people, big talk, small doings," Narayan himself explains his characters: "I try to write from the inside of a villain, and then see his point of view, that's all." Many see in his "underlying sense of beauty and sadness" a parallel with Chekhov. Narayan won numerous awards and honours for his works including the Sahitya Akademi award for The Guide in 1958. He was honoured with the Padma Bhushan, for distinguished service to literature in 1964 and the Padma Vibushan in 2001. He remained a perennial candidate for the Nobel Prize; which eluded him as in the case of many other eminently deserving writers, and this never bothered him in the least. Unlike some of the present day fly-by-night, million-dollar advance, Page three celeb writers, Narayan was an affable, unassuming person leading a quiet writerly life towards the peak of his career from late 1950s to 1960s at the house he had built at Mysore.

Like many of his admirers during a visit to Mysore sometime back, I especially went to see his old house and the oval room; which Narayan had designed for allowing commanding views. He describes it vividly in My Days:

> I had designed a small study – a bay-room with eight windows affording me a view in every direction: the Chamundi Hill temple on the south, a variety of spires, turrets, and domes on the east, sheep and cows grazing in the meadows on all sides, railway trains cutting across the east-west slope "I listened to the deep call of the woodcock in the still afternoons, and the cries of a variety of birds perching on the frangipani tree. Such perfection of surroundings, as I had already realised in my college days, was not conducive to study or writing.

Alas, now it hardly looks like a writer's retreat, but more like a withered, rundown place, ravaged by time and neglect. Perhaps, times may be changing in the new world of Mysore; but for millions of Narayan fans, the soul of Malgudi lives on in the old house .

However, recently eminent citizens of Karnataka, have launched a campaign has been launched to create a memorial to R K Narayan in his centenary year. One of the proposals mooted is to name a train from Mysore to Chennai after Malgudi. One can almost imagine R.K. Narayan boarding the train, amusedly viewing the entire spectacle with his writerly eye and later producing a novel titled Malgudi Express.

It may be desirable at this stage to recall the circumstances which were instrumental for the conception and formation of the present study before the findings of the study are property underlined and the conclusions emerging out of the present study and based on the findings are finally put forth. It is noted that although Narayan enjoys a general critical consensus as a comic-ironist, his critics often register a note of dissent as regards his unchanging and undeveloping characters. It is also pointed out that the Forsterean terms (flat and round), the other western parameters and even the existing Narayan criticism, although helpful to a certain extent, remain inadequate to fully deal with the preordainedly conceived and traditionally realised Narayan characters.

It is stressed that the protagonists in Narayan's novels, imbibing the spirit of their creator as the faithful follower of the sacrosanct tradition, seem to have been precluded from growth, at least on the material plane of realisation, as most of them, in the final analysis, seem to accept the norms and the codes of the society. Since rebellion in the sacrosanct tradition is interpreted as deviation or aberration, the so-called rebels (taken as the deviants) in Narayan's novels almost invariably withdraw from their rebellion and return to the world of the ordinary life of sanity. Most importantly, the apparently unchanging protagonist seems to have no other go but to remain flat, because (a) as Camus points out, he as a Hindu may find the futility of rebellion in the sacrosanct tradition and in fact gets the answers to his problems in the myths; (b) Narayan himself believes that whatever may happen human personality never changes, as Mary McCarthy points out, the incorrigibility and changelessness remain the characteristic features of the comic characters.

It is also underlined that the undeveloping protagonists in Narayan's novels unmistakably suggest the growth in their consciousness, especially as they seem to realise the illusory nature of their existence (at the end of the novel they are seen returning to the world of normal life). This subtle growth, mainly realised on the mental or spiritual plane of meaning, may not be measured by the parameters mentioned earlier. It is at this point that the present typological approach comes into being as a framework, primarily conceived to realise the typical characters in Narayan's novels.

The present typological study may be regarded as a strategy of employing 'wheels within the wheels.' Putting it differently, the general types (stock characters) in Narayan are further considered as the characteristic sub-types (through the typology). For instance, a stock type, namely, a student, plays here an innocent type, and, a doctor plays an eccentric. Eventually the typology seems to become a strategy to serve a three-tier purpose (a) to deal with most of the (relevant) characters in Narayan's novels realised through their traditional trappings, (b) to underline different modes used by the novelist to reveal the character" roles in the novels and (c) note the world-view of the novelist emerging out of the thematic development and character delineation in his novels. In fact the typology is conceived with a modest purpose to underline the basics or the essentials of the novelist and consider them under, what may be called, a one umbrella study.

The character-oriented approach considers four major types of the Narayan characters formed on the basis of their overall nature. It may also be noted that the typological frames-innocence, rebellion, eccentricity and, sanyasa-seem to accommodate most of the major and minor characters in Narayan's novels. It may also be stressed that although the types focussed in the present study show an unmistakable kinship with the well-known types considered by Ben Jonson, Forster, Scholes and Kellog, and Northrop Frye, they basically have a typically Narayanesque stamp of realisation. It may be worthwhile to underline the characteristic features of each typological operation to see how far it fulfils the three-tier purpose and, finally, to deduce certain overall conclusions emerging out of it.

Significantly, most of the characters in Narayan's novels with their umbilical chord may be viewed through the typological frame likened to a large joint-family. Each typological frame has been realised through its distinct family trait. Thus, the characters in the first typological family seem to share the common trait of innocence. Although every Malgudi character has a nuclear innocence, the first family has only those characters who are primarily realised through innocence. Understandably, the children characters happen to be the first to be dealt with. The typological study reveals that most of the children characters, especially in Swami and Friends, have been realised for their commonly known trait of innocence, viewed in the Blakean sense of 'divine innocence.' The children in Narayan's later novels (The Financial Expert and The Guide, for instance) however, seem to have been projected in the sense of 'the child is father of the man.' Taken in its entirety the children portrayal may also be taken as a symbolic projection of Narayan's notion of uncorruptible and untainted human consciousness, breathing pure joy and godliness. Swami and Friends, being the only full-fledged study of childhood innocence, has been dealt with underlining all the shades of innocence like naivete, ignorance, et al. The typology has also noted that the novelist seems to project innocence through the brahmacharyashrama. Excepting

Swaminathan in Swami and Friends, most of the children play secondary roles. In the final analysis, most of them are treated ironically (creating a kind of innocent humour) and are realised as flat characters. Most importantly, Narayan employs the strategy of rite de passage to suggest a subtle realisation (and growth) in Swami and Friends.

Innocence is also reflected through the ripe old people passing through their second childhood. The prominent character figuring here is Granny in Swami and Friends. If Granny's innocence is basically focussed through her ignorance of Swami's modern world, as a character she symbolises the old values and in the final analysis she remains a flat and symbolic character. The third spot of innocence is located in the Malgudi rustics who, like their Hardyesque counterparts, basically function as background characters. If they symbolise innocence through their naivete and ignorance, as the collective unconscious they reflect the traditional values and play choric role. Although, basically mute and gullible, the rustics, particularly in The Bachelor of Arts and The Guide, are realised through their assertive and ironic roles of guiding the protagonists. As they are located on the outskirts of Malgudi, they seem to symbolise a protective ring to safeguard the innocents against their deviating tendencies. In the final analysis, the rustics seem to underline the recurring theme of the Malgudi novels, namely, illusion versus reality and emphasise the assertiveness of the average and the ordinary.

Rebellion, the second typological frame, seems to be Narayan's deceptively projected notion of acceptance (of the traditional norms). In a way, the treatment of rebellion in Narayan also seems to be the reiteration of Camus's view that the Hindu feels the futility in rebellion as he regards the tradition sacrosanctly and finds his answers in the Indian myths. The typology stresses that the term "rebellion" in the sacrosanct society may mean more of deviation (from the norms) than defiance. The typology underlines different kinds of deviation in Narayan's novels. Although most of the novels seem to focus on the protagonists's deviation from the traditional norms (Savitri's forsaking the household in The Dark Room and Chandran's in The Bachelor of Arts, for instance), it is prominently reflected in the form of moral deviation as the deviants are seen flouting the moral codes especially in The Guide, The Vendor of Sweets and The Painter of Signs.

If the typology of innocence presents different faces of innocence, the typology of rebellion notes that almost every Narayan novel presents a distinctly characteristic rebel dramatizing the basic theme of illusion versus reality. Significantly, Narayan seems to have used the motif of journey to underline the illusory nature of life. The typology also notes that if the protagonist's return to the point of beginning, at the end of almost every Narayan novel, suggests the cyclic structure of the novel (imitating the Cosmic Order), it also seems to symbolise the normal and sane state of life and the protagonist's quest towards a life 'freed from distracting illusion and hysterics.' The typology has also noted Narayan's reiterative employment of the strategy of rite de passage to mark the maturity and growth in the protagonist.

The typology has underlined the preordainedly realised role of the rebels. It is exemplified in Savitri's rescue from death (The Dark Room), Daisy's almost accidental exit from the scene, despite her agreement to lead a marital life (The Painter of Signs) and, the sinner's elevation to sainthood (The Guide) to mention just the few instances. It is also noted that dealing with the rebellion, Narayan has heavily borrowed from the Indian mythology. In fact, every Narayan novel seems to have a 'mythic soul.' But if he has used the Shantanu-Ganga (The Painter of Signs) and the Bhasmasura-Mohini (The Man-Eater of Malgudi) myths, he has also used the universally known stories like David and Goliath (The ManEater of Malgudi) and that of Icarus or the Man with Midas touch (The Financial Expert). Again, if most of the protagonists are realised through their cultural trappings and Karma consciousness, most of the novels reiterate the universally known themes of the return of the native or the story of the 'Prodigal Son.' The typology of rebellion makes one aware of the grahasthashrama. Although most of the protagonists apparently remain flat and unchanging they seem to suggest a subtle spiritual growth. Raju in The Guide and Krishnan in The English Teacher may, however, be considered as round characters and Rosie (The Guide) shows all the potentialities of a round character. In the final analysis, the typology also seems to underline the novelistic roles of the protagonists through their comic-ironic realisation.

Eccentricity, the third typological section presents the most bizarre kind of human spectacle. Every third character in the Malgudi novels seems to be an eccentric. Eccentricity, as the most characteristic trait of man, seems to be the caricaturist's presentment of life's inherent inconsistencies and incongruities. Excepting, perhaps, Ebenezar in Swami and Friends, the eccentrics play thematically related roles in the Malgudi novels. One recalls Kailas in The Bachelor of Arts, Balu in The Financial Expert and the Townhall eccentric in The Painter of Signs in this context. As regards their character delineation, the novelist seems to have given them certain distinct roles to play, besides their eccentricity. One recalls the cousin playing Jagan's alter-ego (The Vendor of Sweets), the headmaster playing Krishnan's catalyst (The English Teacher) and the half-moron playing ficelle to Raju (The Guide).

It has been noted that in their distorting appearances and incongruous behaviour is concealed the source of Narayan's comic laughter. It has also been noted that the comic laughter evoked by the eccentrics has almost invariably a ring of sadness. The mere mention of the headmaster in The English Teacher may suffice the purpose. Most of the eccentrics, excepting perhaps Jagan (The Vendor of Sweets) and Nataraj (The Man-Eater of Malgudi), play minor roles and remain one or two liners. The one or two liners may also suggest an assertion of the average and the ordinary. And finally, the typology of eccentricity also makes one aware of the third stage of the ashrama-system, vanaprasthashrama, especially through Krishnan in The English Teacher and Jagan in The Vendor of Sweets.

It is in keeping with the philosophic conception of life that the typological study, which begins with innocence, should culminate into "the wisdom denoting sanyasa. In Narayanesque conception of life, too, the typological study, beginning with brahmacharyashrama, turns a full circle at sanyasashrama. As in the case of the eccentrics, Narayan's obsession with the sanyasis becomes quite clear as one notices every Narayan novel having a sanyasi or a character reminiscent of one. The fourth house of the typological study underlines (through Narayan's presentment of different faces of sanyasa) significant implications underlying the novelist's notion of sanyasa. As an ideal stage in human span of life, sanyasa-renunciation-has been seriously realised, not of course, without the Narayanesque irony in most of the Malgudi novels. Under the pervading and traditionally acknowledged influence of sanyasa, every Narayan novel seems to have something relevant to contribute to the concept of sanyasa.

Taken in their entirety, the Malgudi novels underline unique realisations of sanyasa. If the sceptic Jagan in The Vendor of Sweets, the sinner Raju in The Guide and the Man-eater Raja in A Tiger for Malgudi ironically underline the renunciation motif, they also illustrate the deep-rooted cultural ethos. In fact, the pervadingly felt influence of sanyasa has been presented through every conceivable specimen of a sanyasi: the fake sanyasis sponging on the charitable and gullible rustics's faith and reverence may be seen in The Bachelor of Arts and The Guide. The symbolically realised ones, living like ordinary people but imbibing the sanyasa spirit, are seen in The English Teacher. The Vendor of Sweets presents in Jagan a man of the world, who, although yet to be freed from the human frailly, seems to see the spiritual light of other worldliness and heads towards it. Narayan has two sanyasinis marching away from the world of maya and worldly tics towards their coveted goal of moksha or salvation from the wheel of existence in Waiting for the Mahatma and The Painter of Signs respectively. Finally, A Tiger for Malgudi has a full-fledged sanyasi who, like Rudyard Kipling's Puran Bhagat, having already discharged his duties in the earlier ashramas, comes to be realised as an exemplary one.

Sanyasa seems to be Narayan's yet another strategy to realise the basic theme of his novel: illusion versus reality. Significantly enough, like all the earlier typologies sanyasa also underlines the assertiveness of the average and 'the epic of the commonplace.' (Kaul, 52) It is here that the rustics with their 'mute force' figure prominently. In the last analysis, the unique combination of the essentially spiritual connotation of the sanyasa and Narayan's characteristically comic perception of it may certainly be regarded as a major source of his 'therapeutic comedy.' (Garebian,78)

The foregoing analysis of Narayan's characters through the four typological frames has brought into light several findings related especially to (a) Narayan's delineation of Characters, (b) different strategies to realise the characters's roles and finally (c) the emerging world-view of the novelist. Taken in its entirety the typological study may help one to deduce certain conclusions relating to the craft of Narayan, especially, his characterisation. The conclusions may be focussed under three heads: (a) the milieu, (b) the mode and (c) the mind.

The Milieu

It has been a cliche to regard Narayan as a delineator of middle-class people. Since the typical middle-class milieu constitutes the matrix of all the Malgudi novels, its significance may hardly be exaggerated. The typological study underlines the pervasive influence of the middleclass milieu in Narayan's novels, focussing on significant implications underlying it. Since the conception of his first novella, Swami and Friends, Narayan has been peopling his novels with the middle class whom he knows as closely as perhaps the skin of his palm. His strict confinement to the portrayal of the middle-class milieu often finds Narayan bracketed with Jane Austen (in the context of her 'two-inch ivory tower'). Significantly, all the typological frames underline the average and the ordinary middle-class protagonist as he plays the central consciousness and dramatises the theme of illusion versus reality. In fact, the middle class portrayal seems to have become Narayan's strategy to project several issues.

Basically the middle class offers the novelist an excellent material to dramatise his conception of humanity and the notion of man's existence. What in fact the middle class milieu brings into light is that although Narayan is 'fully immersed in his material, (Updike, 39) and is confined to his South Indian (and Brahmimcal) middle class, he seems to have acquired.the representative in his regional would and thus, in the final analysis, seems to touch the chord of universality, dealing with the tale of the common man. It is through the human spectacle of the middle class that Narayan seems to dramatise the theatre of the absurd. The typology also notes the reflection of the novelists autobiographical elements (especially in his trilogy), the clear indication of his sacrosanct tradition and his faith in the eternal spirit of India, through the middle class portrayal.

Again, it is through the middle class portrayal that Narayan seems to fix the family frame (in almost all the Malgudi novels) as the nucleus of his comedies. And, with family, he brings all the related Issues like the intricate but inevitable web of human relationship, the idealised notion of family roles, the pervading influence of the cultural and especially the mythological background to underline the idealised and sublimely conceived past juxtaposed with trivially and ridiculously realised modernity. It is the family frame that seems to become Narayan's strategic to telescope the protagonist through the traditional trappings, the implication of the (fast disappearing) joint family, the place and image of woman in the Indian (Hindu) household and, the most important member of the family, called Granny, as an epitome of cultural ethos. Most importantly, the typological study considers Narayan's strategic use of the family frame as the culturally conceived stage offering the subtly suggested ashrama system to underline the characteristic struggle of the Malgudi protagonist. Significantly, all the four type logical frames seem to suggest the four ashramas with their underlying impactions.

It is through the middle class that Narayan seems to stress the preordainedly conceived and cyclically operating universe. It is the typical middle class that illustrates Narayan's notion of the transitonness of life realised through the role-playing motif in the Malgudi novels. Again, if the middle class stresses Narayan's notion of character, It also seems to illustrate his moral attitude realised in his treatment of man-woman relationship. It is in this context that AN. Kaul's observation of the Malgudi milieu appears quite pertinent as he says: "Romantic or passionate love has no place in it. Any deviation from it, any impulse or act that denies its centrality is a prime aberration in Narayan. This is especially true of women.". (55) There seems to be a clear indication that the morally deviated individuals (Daisy in The Painter of Signs and Rosie in The Guide) are deprived of domestic contentment. Suggestively enough the typology of eccentricity rarely presents the Malgudi women as they seem to symbolise the sanity of the tradition. Again, there seems to be a clear indication that the deviants suffer and the tradition abiders seem to lead a comparatively peaceful and contented life. David Scott puts it thus: "The warning is loud and clear that those who transgress... may not find reintegration so easy."

Most importantly, the middle class seems to have excellently served the novelist's basic purpose of presenting the common man's predicament, the illusory nature of his life and finally, the realisation of his folly suggesting also a subtle growth in his consciousness. Putting it differently, the study stresses mostly the flat and unchanging protagonist in Narayan's novels and his maturing journey or the spiritually realised growth symbolised in his final withdrawal to the traditionally accepted norms. It is in this context that one also notes Narayan's ultimate concern never with 'here and now' but always with 'there and for all time.

The Mode

If the typological study marks the middle-class milieu as the backbone for the realisation of Narayan's characters, it equally telescopes irony as the overall strategy the novelist employs for the delineation of his characters. Significantly enough, the analytical study of the characters in Narayan's novels in their entirety, reveals that the irony, which begins as a technique or strategy to realise his characters, eventually seems to emerge as his vision. It may also be noted that Narayan, realizing fully the essentially paradoxical and incongruous nature of life, seems to have adopted an ironic attitude to grasp the basically contradictory reality confronting the protagonist. The typology notes the pervadingly employed irony in the delineation of characters and the thematic development in Narayan's novels, and underlines several implications.

To begin with, irony for Narayan becomes an essential device to present the inherent theme of all the Malgudi novels: illusion versus reality. The present study reveals that Narayan delineates most of his characters and presents most of the situations in his novels through ironic filter. In other words, excepting a few characters (mostly the fathers, mothers and a few minor characters), almost every Narayan character seems to have been ironically treated. The typology also notes that the irony has often played a saving grace to conceal a message ill Narayan's novels. Significantly enough, the typology has underlined the characteristically ironic realisation of almost every Narayan novel. Swami and Friends, true to its image as the pace-setter, has been noted, among other things, for its simple but unmistakable irony. If the title underlines the simplest form of verbal irony as it deflates the reader's anticipation for the conventionally realise sanyasi, what seems to be telescoped through the last scene of parting is a sense of discrepancy in life as an inevitable clement of man's pediment. Narayan underlines the essentially absurd element of life ill The Bachelor of Arts, but the novel seems to equally emphasise the mistaken identity as one of the elemental features of life through the Situational irony. Even an apparently grim and serious theme in. The Dark Room cannot altogether keep Narayan's irony out. Through it Narayan marks an ambivalent attitude of Savitri towards her tyrant husband and especially her decision to commit suicide. It also, seems to underline the despotic influence of the male-dominated society and expose the tyrant's double-dealing, touching subtly the comic chord.

Casting Krishnan against the eccentric headmaster, the irony ill The English Teacher underlines the paradoxical and inconsistent nature of life. More importantly, as the dead wife (Susila) enlightens her husband, the novel seems to suggest an 'Eastern answer' to the universally felt phenomenon called 'the other side of the medal,' death: (Kaul, 49) Concealed in the deceptive eccentricity of Krishnan's family doctor is perhaps the Indian attitude to death. It is here that the irony plays a saving grace as the novel tends in become overtly philosophical. In Mr. Sampath again, the ambivalent and inconsistent attitude of Srinivas seems to become an ironic strategy to underline his end by implication Narayan's philosophy of quietism and non-doing, nature's inherent power of balancing the temporarily disrupted peace of the world, the preordamed nature of life and, finally, the novelist's unshakable belief in the eternal spirit of India. The basic irony, besides the, apparent verbal Irony m the protagonist's name and the title in The Financial Expert, seems to underline the spiritual realisation in Margayya's rise and fall. The typology points out how in his case the rise becomes the fall and the fall, rise. The irony also focuses on the thematic relevance in the story of Icarus and that of the 'Prodigal Son.' It also seems to suggest the Wordsworthian epigram: Child is father of man, as Balu, the only son, becomes Margayya's nemesis.

The Guide remains the richest illustration in the context of Narayan's use of irony. The inherent theme of illusion versus reality, the role playing motif and the overall ambivalent nature of the novel lend naturally to irony. The typology notes the ironic treatment of the characters and situations in the novel. At the outset, Narayan seems to employ an ironic strategy to telescope the triangular love story. The typology underlines the basic inconsistency and absurdity in life and marks the totally disparate attitudes of Marco and Rosie and Rosie's ambivalent attitude to her husband, especially after her 'fall' suggesting the formidable influence of the tradition on a Hindu wife. Apart from the strategic use of irony in the delineation of characters, Narayan seems to have employed it 10 focus on (a) the redemption of sin, (b) the mistaken identity and (c) the Karma consequence suggested in the lonely existence of the involved persons. But Narayan's telling irony strikes as the sinner ultimately seems to become a saint, a martyr. Significantly, as the secondary characters like Velan's half-moron brother and his sister practically dictate the life of the protagonist and virtually control the reins of his fate, the typology notes how the 'atomic' creature explode (devastatingly) in The Guide, suggesting vividly the extraordinariness of the average and the ordinary.

Irony once again seems to reign supreme in The Man-Eater of Malgudi. It primarily telescopes Nataraj's altruism concealed in his eccentric role as the lord of the misrule. As Nataraj, symbolically playing David, kills Vasu, playing Goliath, Narayan's irony reinforces the theme of the battle between the good and the evil. Again, in Vasu's ironic death, Narayan's intention of presenting the modern version of Bhasmasura, becomes quite clear. In the final analysis, the irony in The Man-Eater of Malgudi underlines the triumphing of the good over the evil, of the ordainary over the extraordinary.

Through apparently dramatised eccentricity of Jagan, besides the irony in his name and the title of the novel, the novelist seems to underline the fundamental ambivalent nature of life. Jagan's leaving for the forest resort with the bank book marks the ironic realisation of his sanyasa suggesting the sceptic's attitude in the context of the sacrosanct tradition. In The Painter of Signs irony is mostly indicative of the illusory nature of life and its absurd and inconsistent realisation especially in the topsy-turvying of Raman's resolutions and in Daisy's eccentric behaviour. Looking closely, however, the irony in The Painter of Signs seems to be Narayan's strategy to underline (a) the nature and implication of rebellion as deviation, (b) Narayan's traditionally conceived notion of man-woman relationship, and (c) the influence of the sacrosanct tradition. Finally, the fable-like A Tiger for Malgudi, Narayan's version of the Panchatantra tale, has also come out with a subtle ironic realisation as the man-eater (Raja) becomes the practitioner of ahimsa, especially as he is juxtaposed with Vasu, the man-eater of Malgudi.

Considering the use and development of irony in the total corpus of the Narayan novel, the typology notes that Narayan's ironic vision underlines his "recognition of the fact that world in its essence is paradoxical and that an ambivalent attitude alone can grasp its contradictory totality." As regards Narayan's character delineation, the use of irony once again underlines the novelist's dealing with the flat characters and the subtle growth suggested through the realisation of their folly of getting lost in the illusory world and finally returning to the world of solid existence and normalcy.

The typology notes certain essential features of Narayan's comedy illustrated through his natural creations, the caricatures, and some endearing comic portrayals. Narayan remains incapable of creating loud and resounding laughter.

Instead, one often hears his gentle, subdued and tongue-in-cheek humour. The interspersed comic tone sticks like skin to the body of the novel. Most importantly, Narayan's acceptance of the totality of life may account for his 'serious comedy.' Putting it differently, Narayan's comedy has an inevitable ring of pathos. The typology illustrates Narayan's characteristic comedy through two crucial instances: (a) as Margayya (The Financial Expert) faces the death-blow of insolvency, an ice-cream pedlar is heard shouting, 'ice-cream' and (b) the festive mood set absurdly against Raju's (The Guide) imminent death.

The typology also considers the sources of the comic laughter in Narayan's novels. In terms of his characters the novelist seems to have succeeded in evoking a characteristic comic laughter primarily in the portrayal of the odd men. The 'gift of the caricaturist' enables Narayan to present effortlessly most of his eccentrics. It is mostly in the idiosyncratically incongruous behaviour and the odd appearances of the eccentrics that Narayan creates an amused sense. In terms of thematic development, the comicality in Narayan's novels is located in the dramatisation of the absurd or mistaken identity in life.

All the frames of the typology note Narayan's strategic use of the comic. If one is amused to note the naivete and ignorance of Narayan's children especially in Swami and Friends, his rustics, mostly in The Guide, and grannies, especially in Swami and Friends, one also notes the underlying world of innocence (reminiscent of the pre-lapsarian state of existence), the pervading influence of the sacrosanct tradition and, the dynamics of the ordinary characters (especially in the case of the rustics) in the above-mentioned instances. The subdued laughter, especially created by the eccentrics, conceals the novelist's suggestion of life's inherent inconsistencies. In fact, Narayan's serio-comic art seems to become an overall strategy for the ironic presentment of illusion versus reality, the basic theme of the Malgudi novels.

The Mind

As one considers Narayan's world-view (in the context of his novels, that is), one notes that despite his non-committal stance, the novelist has been known for his identifiable world-view. Narayan's world-view reflects his characteristically traditional views regarding human existence, the mysterious phenomenon called life, and the most weird thing known as the universe. Although Narayan's world-view is reflected in his stray articles, interviews and speeches, his preface to Gods, Demons and Others remains the fountainhead of it. It is through the preface 'The World of the Story-teller' that Narayan seems to view the human spectacle cast against an enormously realised universe.

In Narayan's world, regarded as lila or maya, life is essentially conceived as a game of shadows and man as a mere role player. In this Brahma-created and preordainedly realised world, human life, following the strict order of destiny, remains static in its final realisation. Human existence also runs according to the inexorable law of Karma. Nature is realised with its inherent power of balancing the temporarily disrupted order of the world. The good is seen triumphing over the evil, often through the intervening of avatar to vanquish the rakshasa threatening the established peace and order. The tradition remains sacrosanct, the Vedas and the Shastras have irrefutable supremacy and are followed reverently.

Significantly, the world-view seems to have been fully mirrored in Narayan's novels. Like his creator, the novelist too views his (novelistic) human spectacle with amused detachment. Rebellion in the sacrosanct tradition is regarded as deviation (from the norms) and is often seen heading towards his doomed existence. Consequently, change, especially reflected in the protagonist's attitude or action running against the codes, is always interpreted negatively. It is in this context that Edwin Gerow's observation becomes quite meaningful: "The settled order of the cosmos is, in the Indian view, the fundamental ontological fact; change itself is not seen for what it produces ... as, in other words, a positive factor ... but more negatively as a play of shadows within the stable whole." This may, perhaps, account for the flatness of Narayan's characters. The typology has noted a vivid reflection of the novelist's world-view in all his novels.

Most of Narayan's novels employ a cyclic structure. It begins with Swami and Friends as Swami is safely brought home from the forest escapade. The circular structure symbolises the similarly realised cosmic order; the four yugas followed by the pralaya. It also implies the strategic use of journey as the realizing school for the protagonists in Narayan's novels. Swami (Swami and Friends), Chandran (The Bachelor of Arts) and Savitri (The Dark Room) seem to illustrate the motif of journey. The circular structure also underlines the recurring theme of most of the novels: the return of the native.

As 'The World of the Story-Teller' specifies, one often notices the suggestively presented triumphing of the good over the evil. If it is consciously fictionalised in The Man-Eater of Malgudi, in most of Narayan's novels it seems to be symbolically realised in its quieting of the warring elements. The influence of the Vedas and the Shastras in the character portrayal and in the thematic development has also been underlined as a recurring feature of Narayan's novels. It is difficult to pinpoint the influence because it is felt like the atmosphere. In the final analysis, it may be said that although the novelist's world-view-the Hindu way of life is faithfully reflected in his novels, it certainly has become the indivisible part of the spectacle of life he presents. So natural is the compound of his world-view and the characteristic quest of his protagonist for maturity that one may be prompted to recall Yeats's famous line, "How can we know the dance from the dancer'!"

Finally, the overall conclusions of the present study may be synoptically underlined. To begin with, the typological approach may be considered as a viable approach to the study of Narayan's novels, offering a three-tier strategy to deal with (a) the typical Narayan characters, (b) the techniques employed to realise their characteristic roles, and (c) the philosophy of the novelist. This study finds it essential to approach Narayan's characters, rooted firmly in the soil of their culture, through a traditionally formed frame of reference, finding the Western parameter too inadequate to deal with them. The approach explores the myth of the flat character in the context of Narayan's novels. It seems that the so-called flat characters remain the obvious and the inevitable choice of the novelist dealing with the people specially underlined for their unchanging nature and undeveloping personality. In other words, it has been noted that Narayan as the delineator of the comic and the preordainedly realised middle-class characters finds the flat characters as the only choice. It is in the context of the overall characterisation in the Malgudi novels that the typological approach underlines the flatness of Narayan's characters as the characteristic and not as the limitation of the novelist.

The typological approach notes illusion versus reality as the recurring theme of almost every Narayan novel. The theme of mistaken identity is realised through the characteristic role the Narayan protagonist plays against the background of the essentially sacrosanct tradition. Most importantly, the strategy of rite de passage seems to underline the symbolically suggested growth of the deviating protagonists. The growth may be discerned in the recurring theme of the Malgudi novels: the return of the native or the story of the 'Prodigal Son.'

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